MORE PUZZLES, MORE FUN FULL PAGE IN LIFE

WEEK IN REVIEW THIS WEEK'S TOP NEWS, 5A

USA TODAY WEEKEND

THE NATION'S NEWS | $3 | JANUARY 10-12, 2025

"DEFENSIVE" BY JEREMY FREY. PROVIDED BY ERIC STONER

'Better Man' biopic embraces the wild

British pop singer Robbie Williams says being portrayed as a chimp in musical film is "genius." **In Life**

Buckeyes freshman already NFL-ready

OSU receiver Jeremiah Smith should challenge eligibility rules, Dan Wolken writes. **In Sports**

Indigenous artists making own paths

Pushback grows against collectors who seek to define Native art in narrow ways. **In Weekend Extra**

E2

FAREWELL TO JIMMY CARTER NATION'S 39TH PRESIDENT

The people's servant

With friends, family and dignitaries gathered, former President Jimmy Carter's casket arrives at Washington National Cathedral. HAIYUN JIANG/POOL VIA GETTY IMAGES

Nation honors its humble statesman

Savannah Kuchar, Christopher Cann and Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy
USA TODAY

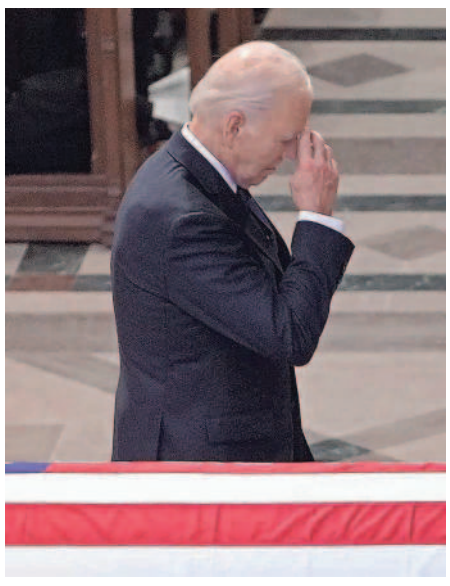
WASHINGTON – Former President Jimmy Carter, who died Dec. 29 after becoming the first former president to live to be 100 years old, was honored with a state funeral Thursday at the National Cathedral in Washington attended by five presidents, including President Joe Biden, who delivered a eulogy.

Biden, who was in his first term as a senator for Delaware in 1977 at the time Carter was in office, has said the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize winner's long career as a humanitarian in many ways overshadowed his time in the Oval Office.

On Thursday, Biden hailed Carter as "a practitioner of good works" in his eulogy, delivered on the final day of the state funeral.

"Patriots like Jimmy Carter, throughout his life he showed us what it means to be practitioner of good works and a good and faithful

See CARTER, Page 3A



President Joe Biden, who delivered Carter's eulogy, pays his last respects to his longtime friend on Thursday.
JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY

The US presidents club, one outsider to another

Susan Page
Washington Bureau Chief
USA TODAY

James Earl Carter was always the odd man out, until Donald Trump came along.

The solemn participation of five presidents, current and former, at the state funeral for former President Jimmy Carter at Washington National Cathedral on Thursday might well have bemused, well, Jimmy Carter.

James Earl Carter was always the odd man out in the former-presidents club, at least until Donald Trump joined their ranks.

Carter didn't seem to care when he exasperated his successors by injecting himself into foreign policy or criticizing what they were doing in the office he once held. He had arrived in Washington in 1977 as an outsider, a one-term Georgia governor elected after the tumult of the Watergate scandal, and he (involuntarily) left town four years later the same way.

He had always been supremely confident in his judgment and the rightness of his views, regardless of those who might disagree or bristle. After he moved back to his hometown of Plains,

See PAGE, Page 3A

Experts doubt TikTok users will be able to sway justices

Maureen Groppe
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Some of the 170 million Americans who use TikTok to sell cookies, promote books by Black authors, comment on sports, advocate for sexual assault survivors and more say the stakes couldn't be higher when the Supreme Court on Friday debates the fate of the wildly popular short-form video app.

The court has rarely, if ever, confronted a free speech case that matters to so many people, lawyers for TikTok content creators told the justices in a filing.

The TikTok users said they will lose the most powerful mechanism available to make their voices heard unless

See TIKTOK, Page 6A

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Amid fires, scarce LA water supply 'pushed the system to the extreme'

A residential building burns Thursday in Pacific Palisades, near Los Angeles.
APU GOMES/GETTY IMAGES

Michael Loria
USA TODAY

One after another, the million-gallon tanks firefighters tapped into to douse the deadly Los Angeles wildfires went dry, leaving them without enough water to fight the flames, officials said Wednesday.

The admission comes as residents have wondered how the wildfires – whose causes are still under investigation – got so out of hand and turned into one of the most devastating Los Angeles

See WATER SUPPLY, Page 6A

South, Mid-Atlantic brace for another icy winter storm

Weather service warns of massive power outages

N'dea Yancey-Bragg
USA TODAY

Another brewing winter storm was forecast to dump heavy snow, ice and freezing rain from the South to the Mid-Atlantic this week, which could knock out power and close roads.

Days after a deadly storm pummeled the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions, a developing system was expected to move out of Mexico across the Gulf Coast to western Florida by Friday evening and hit the southern Mid-Atlantic coast by Saturday.

The storm could bring 6 to 8 inches of snow from southeast Oklahoma through western North Carolina, the National Weather Service warned Thursday. Ice and freezing rain were expected to hit the southern Plains and Lower Mississippi Valley before heading toward parts of the Southeast, Southern Appalachians and up to the Mid-Atlantic.

Thousands of customers in the path of the storm were already without power early Thursday, according to USA TODAY's power outage tracker.

More than 5,600 homes and businesses in southern Indiana and 3,100 in Kentucky were in the dark by midmorning. Another nearly 6,000 were without power in eastern Missouri.

The Tennessee Valley could see some of the heaviest snowfall, with 6 inches expected Friday. A wide swath of the country was under winter weather warnings and advisories and could see "widespread closures, treacherous travel, scattered power outages, and downed branches," the weather service said.

"Roads, and especially bridges and overpasses, will likely become slick and hazardous," the weather service office in Shreveport, Louisiana, warned. "The strong winds and weight of snow on tree limbs may down power lines and could cause sporadic power outages. Power outages and tree damage are likely due to the ice. Travel could be nearly impossible."

Dozens of winter storm warnings were in place in northeastern Texas, southeastern Oklahoma, southern Arkansas, northern Louisiana and southeastern Missouri. They were set to expire Friday. Warnings were expected to remain in effect in Tennessee and northern Alabama, as well as in portions of south-central Indiana and Kentucky, through Saturday.

The National Weather Service in Atlanta also warned that most of north Georgia was under a winter storm watch and should be prepared for difficult travel and power outages.

A woman who is homeless lines up for food and clothes from mobile outreach workers with Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center at a camp in Austin on Thursday.
JAY JANNER/USA TODAY NETWORK

"In places that don't get snow or ice very often, such as Austin, Dallas, Little Rock and Nashville, it will be a big deal."

Tom Kines
AccuWeather meteorologist

"In places that don't get snow or ice very often, such as Austin, Dallas, Little Rock and Nashville, it will be a big deal," AccuWeather meteorologist Tom Kines told USA TODAY this week, noting that cities like Dallas could see their most significant snowfalls in several years.

Texas preps for heavy snow, sleet

A mixture of snow, sleet and freezing rain has already begun as the storm, dubbed Winter Storm Cora, hit western Texas, The Weather Channel reported Thursday.

Two to 5 inches of snow and sleet were expected to accumulate in parts of the state. Isolated snowfall could reach up to 10 inches in some areas, the weather service in Fort Worth said.

Dozens of schools were closed or opened late across north and central Texas in anticipation of the storm. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said Wednesday that he had directed state agencies to prepare for the inclement weather, concentrating resources in northern and western Texas.

Electric Reliability Council of Texas Chief Pablo Vegas said the state's power grid, which came within minutes of total collapse during a 2021 winter storm, is expected to have a "more than adequate supply" of energy to keep homes powered and warm through this one.

Contributing: Christopher Cann, USA TODAY; Bianca Moreno-Paz, Austin American-Statesman

New Englanders struggle to afford heat during weather

Residents conserve to avoid exorbitant bills

Claire Thornton
USA TODAY

For the past three winters, Ishmael Rodriguez has spent most winter nights in Boston sneaking into bus stations for a few hours overnight and riding the red and orange T lines as soon as they open in the morning. But during frigid weeks, like this one, temperatures dipping to the teens push him inside.

Across New England, which has some of the harshest winters in the country, the high cost of living in areas like Boston has made it harder for residents to afford heating bills or access warm shelter. In Massachusetts, nearly 30,000 people experienced homelessness in 2024 while 10% of the state's population lives in poverty, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Census, respectively.

This week, Massachusetts residents are conserving heat to avoid exorbitant electric bills. Freezing weather has also brought Boston's unhoused communities to a standstill, as people stay put for periods in shelters and warming centers.

"At night it's very, very brutal," said Rodriguez, 58, who has been homeless since 2021 when he lost his job on the kitchen staff at Boston's Suffolk University.

Temperatures will remain well below freezing through Thursday, and there's a chance of snow this weekend, a trend that's persisted all week.

Like Boston, other Massachusetts cities including Worcester and Lowell have funds available for hundreds of families who need help paying for heat. But some people don't have electricity or a proper heating system, said Alex Porteleki, who manages a hardware store in the Boston suburb of Roslindale.

So far this month, Porteleki said he's seen four people purchase miniature propane tanks to power portable camping heaters.

"We do get people coming in here who look like they're living outside," Porteleki, 49, told USA TODAY.

'There is compassion'

On Wednesday, Rodriguez was eating pretzels, drinking coffee and making crafts at Emmanuel Church, an episcopal congregation nestled between Boston's upscale Back Bay and Beacon Hill neighborhoods.

Rodriguez said he prefers to live outside most of the year because there are too many people with mental health problems in the city's shelters. In recent years, there are also new crowds of migrants bused from the southern border, he said.

But "this week has been very, very cold and I don't stay outside," Rodriguez told USA TODAY over a phone interview from the church's warming center.

He's stayed at a few other warming hubs, including some that just offer people a place to lay on the ground and send them on their way in the morning, he said.

"You have heat but then at a certain point you have to go," Rodriguez said. "There is compassion but it needs to be more."

Winter brings memories of homeless neighbors

This winter, Emmanuel Church Events Administrator Robb Scholten said he's grateful a homeless woman who lived outdoors in the neighborhood for 14 years recently got a subsidized apartment of her own.

"At least I know she's OK," Scholten, 58, told USA TODAY.

Emmanuel Church's warming center, a space open during winter months for people seeking refuge indoors, had about 65 visitors Wednesday, including Rodriguez. That number is usually closer to 100, but it was so cold in Boston this week that homeless service providers throughout the city told people to stay put at all costs and not venture out of homeless shelters for errands.

"This community usually spends a lot of time on the streets traveling from one event to another," Scholten told USA TODAY. "They know they can get a free lunch one place and dinner another place."

In Roslindale, Porteleki said he still thinks about a well-liked homeless man in the neighborhood who would visit the Ace Hardware store. When the man was living out of his car during the winter of 2007, he died overnight after the vehicle ran out of gas, Porteleki said.

"He just didn't wake up one morning," Porteleki said.

Cold homes and electric heaters

Because much of New England's housing stock is so old, residents often struggle to heat their dwellings effectively, Porteleki said. If you're not careful, you could wind up with a "four-digit" heating bill, he said.

Scholten said he turns down the heat in his home as low as he can stand it overnight, and during the day while he's at work. It just "doesn't make sense" to pay for any heat while he's not home, he said.

Porteleki said throughout New England, people with enough housing but not enough income to meet other needs are going without adequate heat right now, turning down thermostats as low as possible without risking frozen pipes. Whole sections of homes are "no-go zones" this week, he said, and people are likely huddling next to portable electric heaters plugged into the wall, wrapped in blankets.

"People are suffering in that regard too," Porteleki said.

N.Y.'s top court: Trump's hush money sentencing can proceed

Aysha Bagchi and Maureen Groppe
USA TODAY

New York's highest court refused to halt President-elect Donald Trump's criminal sentencing – scheduled for Friday – in his hush money criminal case.

Thursday's ruling is the latest setback for Trump in his efforts to get sentencing for his conviction on 34 felony counts derailed after an appeals court upheld the sentencing date Tuesday. Trump has also asked the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the sentencing, which still hasn't ruled on his request.

A 12-person Manhattan jury unanimously concluded on May 30 that Trump falsified business records 34 separate times in order to cover up a hush money payment made to porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

Supreme Court appeal

In his request for the Supreme Court to block the sentencing, Trump argued that Manhattan Judge Juan Merchan doesn't have the authority to sentence him until appeals courts have ruled on Trump's argument that the entire case should be dismissed based on presidential immunity. Trump is arguing that evidence connected to his first presidency was improperly allowed at his trial.

In addition, Trump urged the justices to block the sentencing because he is engaging "in the extraordinarily demanding task of preparing to assume the Executive power of the United States."

In a response filed Thursday, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said Trump is making an "extraordinary" claim that the immunity he will enjoy once he returns to the White House applies now.

"Non-employees of the government do not exercise any official function that would be impaired by the conclusion of a criminal case against a private citizen for private conduct," Bragg told the Supreme Court.

He also said there's no basis for the court to intervene in a state criminal trial before an appeals court has reviewed Trump's conviction.

Why Trump likely will be spared jail time

Merchan already indicated his inclination to sentence Trump to an "unconditional discharge," which means the soon-to-be president wouldn't face any ongoing criminal supervision or conditions. Although normally a conviction on the charges Trump faced would have allowed Merchan to impose a broad range of sentences – from mere community service to several years in prison – the judge described an unconditional sentence as "the most viable solution" to bring the case to a close, allow Trump to pursue an appeal, and avoid interfering with Trump's upcoming presidency.

"While this Court as a matter of law must not make any determination on sentencing prior to giving the parties and Defendant an opportunity to be heard, it seems proper at this juncture to make known the Court's inclination to not impose any sentence of incarceration, a sentence authorized by the conviction but one the People concede they no longer view as a practicable recommendation," Merchan wrote in a Jan. 3 order.

Prosecutors in Bragg's office argued in a Dec. 9 court filing that Merchan might not be permitted to impose jail or prison time given the special legal protections Trump will have during his upcoming presidency.

The court "is not required to impose a sentence of incarceration at all, and could even impose an unconditional discharge," prosecutors wrote.

Merchan ruled that Trump could appear virtually rather than in person if he preferred, to minimize the mental and physical demands on the real estate mogul during his presidential transition period.

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Page

Continued from Page 1A

Georgia, his decades of work on behalf of free elections, affordable housing and public health gave him the standing to say and do what he wanted.

Being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 helped, too.

Carter's "enduring attribute" was "character, character, character," President Joe Biden declared in his eulogy, the 46th president saying goodbye to the 39th. "Because of that, I believe character is destiny – destiny in our lives and quite frankly, destiny in the life of our nation."

Sitting in the front row of the vaulted cathedral were not only Biden but also Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Trump. It was the first time as many as five current or former occupants of the Oval Office had gathered in one place since the funeral in 2018 of George H.W. Bush, another dearly departed member of their exclusive ranks.

Their united presence presumably stemmed from their sense of obligation for the rituals that unite and define the nation, like state funerals and presidential inaugurations. But it also may reflect the advice often misattributed to Yogi Berra: "Always go to other people's funerals; otherwise they won't go to yours."

There was a time when former presidents generally observed an implicit fraternity pledge to avoid publicly blasting their successors, even those they had battled in bitter campaigns. The elder Bush, denied a second term by Clinton, made a public commitment to stay out of the political to-and-fro, a promise he kept. He was "not in the press conference or the op-ed business," he told USA TODAY in an interview in 2002.

But Carter regularly violated that political norm through the administrations of Republicans and fellow Democrats alike.

"Just as he was free with sometimes unsolicited advice for his presidential successors, the Lord of all creation should be ready for Jimmy's recommendations on how to make God's realm a more peaceful place," former Carter adviser Stuart Eisenstat said in his funeral remarks, drawing knowing laughter from Presidents' Row.

Carter met with some foreign leaders when sitting presidents were trying to ostracize them, including Fidel Castro of Cuba and Hafez al-Assad of Syria. He traveled to North Korea to negotiate nuclear limits, then talked about the results on CNN before he had discussed them with then-President Clinton.

He made clear his contempt for Ronald Reagan and his policies, criticized Clinton for his affair with Monica Lewinsky, called the younger Bush's administration "the worst in history," and suggested that because of Russian interference Trump hadn't won the 2016 election fair and square.

Trump responded by calling him a "terrible president."

Yet Trump, 11 days away from being inaugurated for a second term, showed up at the funeral with his wife, Melania.

In a way, Trump's election in 2016 meant Carter was no longer the designated rogue. Biden, Obama and Clinton depicted Trump as a danger to democracy itself, a more consequential concern than anything ever leveled at Carter, who was honored for his work worldwide to strengthen democracies. Even George W. Bush, a lifelong Republican, didn't vote for Trump in 2020, instead writing in the name of his former secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice.

Trump was seated next to Obama, the two men chatting and smiling. But neither Clinton nor Bush shook hands with Trump when they entered to be seated down the row from him, though Bush did give Obama a passing affectionate belly tap. Vice President Kamala Harris and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential nominees he defeated in 2024 and 2016, didn't make an effort to shake Trump's hand, either.

In an interview in 1997, Clinton offered USA TODAY an explanation for why it can be hard for presidents and former presidents to get along.

"When you have two strong-willed people and you've got a lot of things that happen over a long relationship, there will be from time to time when it's not just exactly like you'd like it to be," Clinton said for a story about his relationship with Carter.

Their history was fraught. As Arkansas governor, Clinton blamed then-President Carter for costing him a reelection bid. Carter's administration had housed Cuban refugees from the Mariel boatlift at Arkansas' Fort Chaffee, a damaging political move after riots there.

Carter acknowledged the strains. "We've been disappointed at times by a lack of easy communication and understanding with some of the people who work under President Clinton," he told USA TODAY in 1997.

Two years later, though, Clinton awarded Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Biden was closer to Carter than any of the other living presidents. Then the junior senator from Delaware, Biden was the first Democratic official outside Georgia to endorse Carter's presidential run. He was the last president or former president to meet with Carter to say goodbye.

On the 100th day of his presidency, Biden flew to Plains for a final meeting with Carter, then 96 years old and in declining health. That was when Carter first broached the idea of Biden delivering his eulogy, whenever that time came.

"Granted, I had some disagreements with him, and some of them were published," Biden told USA TODAY in an interview Sunday. He had been sufficiently disgruntled with Carter's leadership in 1980 that he briefly considered joining Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy in challenging him for the Democratic nomination. "But Carter was a decent man."

In his eulogy, Biden described his last meeting with Carter, in Plains. "We saw Jimmy as he always was, at peace with a life fully lived – a good life, with purpose and meaning. Character, driven by destiny, and filled with the power of faith, hope and love.

"May God bless you, Jimmy Carter."

Carter

Continued from Page 1A

servant of God and of the people," Biden said. "And today, many think he was from a bygone era, but in reality he saw well into the future."

Biden told USA TODAY in a interview Sunday that delivering Carter's eulogy was a promise he made in 2021, the last time the two saw each other. Carter was 96 at the time.

Their friendship dates back to 1974, when Biden was serving his first term as senator and Carter was in the final year of his only term as governor of Georgia. Before Biden, 31 at the time, was supposed to give a speech in Atlanta, the two men met at the governor's mansion and hit it off.

"A white Southern Baptist who led the civil rights, a decorated Navy veteran who brokered peace, a brilliant nuclear engineer who led on nuclear nonproliferation, a hardworking farmer who championed conservation and clean energy," Biden said. "Jimmy Carter also established a model postpresidency by making a powerful difference as a private citizen in America."

Among tributes paid were eulogies written by former President Gerald R. Ford who died in 2006, read by his son Steve, and another written by Walter Mondale, Carter's vice president, also written before his death and delivered by his son, Ted. Carter's grandson Jason also paid homage to his grandfather.

"They were small town people who never forgot who they were and where they were from, no matter what happened in their lives," Jason Carter said, speaking of grandparents Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter.

"But I recognize that we are not here because he was just a regular guy," he said. "His political life and his presidency, for me, was not just ahead of its time. It was prophetic."

As the somber ceremony began and a bitterly cold wind blew, Carter's flag-draped casket was carried up the stone steps of the cathedral by a military honor guard after its trip from the Capitol, where his body had lain in state for two days.

President-elect Donald Trump was among the luminaries at the funeral before Carter's body is returned to Georgia, where Carter was raised and became a peanut farmer. Entering the cathedral with his wife, Melania, Trump shook hands with his former vice president, Mike Pence, with whom he had clashed after Pence refused to go along with his attempts to overturn his 2020 election defeat.

Trump, who will return to office Jan. 20, sat next to former President Barack Obama, with whom he chatted as introductory music played. To Obama's right were Laura and George W. Bush and Hillary and Bill Clinton. Biden and first lady Jill Biden took seats in the first row next to Vice President Kamala Harris and second gentleman Douglas Emhoff.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Vice President-elect JD Vance and Biden's son Hunter were also among the mourners. Former vice presidents Al Gore and Pence sat beside each other.

Former presidents, dignitaries and guests stand as the casket bearing the body of former President Jimmy Carter is carried into the Washington National Cathedral on Thursday. Carter was 100 when he died Dec. 29. JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY

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Scan the QR code to preorder our exclusive book chronicling Jimmy Carter's life and legacy, a 160-page hardcover volume from the USA TODAY Network.

"Throughout his life he showed us what it means to be practitioner of good works and a good and faithful servant of God and of the people."

President Joe Biden

Donald and Melania Trump paid their respects to Carter at the Capitol rotunda on Wednesday evening. The president-elect later told reporters he had met with the Carter family.

"Went over to Blair House. I went over with the first lady. Met the Carter family. They were lovely. They were very sad. But also they were celebrating. Because he was a very fine man. I knew him a little bit. But I knew him only as a fine man," he said.

Thursday marked a national day of mourning in honor of Carter as the Postal Service and federal offices shuttered for the day. The services were the culmination of a series of memorials that began in Georgia late last week.

The state funeral began Saturday in Americus, Georgia, and proceeded to Carter's hometown, Plains, before the motorcade traveled to Atlanta for a ceremony at the Carter Center.

On Tuesday, Carter's remains arrived in Washington, where he lay in state at the Capitol rotunda.

Members of the public paid their respects to Carter as the former president was lying in state from Tuesday evening through Thursday morning. From framing how they see the role of the president to leaving a legacy of kindness and decency, the 39th president left a lasting impression on Americans across the country.

Aggie Heller, 68, was in Washington for Carter's 1977 inaugural parade. She returned almost 50 years later Tuesday to watch his casket be brought to the Capitol and pay her respects.

"I am here because he was such a good man," she said. "Nobody can beat his loyalty to his country."

Carter outlived his successors Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush; former House Speaker Tip O'Neill; and his own vice president, Walter Mondale.

But there are still some in Washington today who were there for Carter's one-term leadership. Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, was serving while Carter was in the White House. On Wednesday, he visited Carter's casket in the Capitol rotunda.

"I will remember him fondly Jimmy Carter is now in his heavenly home," Grassley wrote on social platform X.

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington's nonvoting delegate in the House, called Carter a "model" for presidents upon leaving office in a statement offering her condolences to his family. Carter nominated Norton in 1977 to be chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the first woman to serve in the role.

The son of a farmer and nurse, Carter was born Oct. 1, 1924, in Plains, according to his official biography. He grew up in nearby Archery. He attended public schools, went to the U.S. Naval Academy and became a nuclear engineer, serving on the second nuclear submarine. He married Rosalynn Smith in 1946.

When his father died, Carter returned home to his family farm and also operated a seed and farm supply company in Plains. He served in the Georgia Senate before becoming governor in 1971.

In 1976, he ran for president as a Democrat and won, beginning his single term at age 52.

As president, Carter expanded diplomatic relations abroad, invested in the energy sector and increased national park space for Americans. But he also oversaw inflation and an American hostage crisis that probably cost his reelection, losing to Reagan.

Carter had a lengthy postpresidency with humanitarian work across the globe, including with preventable diseases. In 2002, he won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to "find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development."

On Nov. 19, 2023, Rosalynn Carter died at their home in Plains. She was 96. Carter returned to be buried beside her after a private ceremony later Thursday.

Contributing: JJ Hensley, Marina Pitofsky and Sudiksha Kochi, USA TODAY; Reuters

Laken Riley Act passes House, on to Senate

More Democrats have expressed support for bill

Fernando Cervantes Jr.
USA TODAY

The new Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed its first bill Tuesday, the Laken Riley Act, named for the 22-year-old Georgia nursing school student killed by a Venezuelan immigrant living in the country without legal permission.

Laken Riley's murder became a rallying cry for Republicans during the 2024 presidential campaign, and President-elect Donald Trump brought up the case repeatedly as he called for better border security.

The Laken Riley Act was passed on a 264-159 vote, with 48 House Democrats joining the Republican majority. The bill will now move to the Republican-controlled Senate, which will take the measure up on Friday.

All 52 Senate Republicans and Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania are co-sponsors of the bill. But Republicans need seven more Democratic votes to overcome a filibuster and begin debate of the bill in the Senate.

Civil and immigrant rights organizations have said the act could pose a threat to civil liberties and could lead to increased racial profiling. Supporters of the bill say that it will make the U.S. safer and that if it had been law in 2024, it may have saved Riley's life.

What is the Laken Riley Act?

Written by Rep. Mike Collins of Georgia, the bill would require U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to take custody of immigrants in the United States illegally who commit theft-related crimes like shoplifting.

The act also includes a provision allowing state attorneys who consider their state or its residents harmed by immigration policies to sue the Department of Homeland Security.

Who is Laken Riley?

Riley, 22, was studying nursing at Augusta University in Athens when she went for a run on the morning of Feb. 22, 2024, on the University of Georgia campus.

Prosecutors said Jose Antonio Ibarra, 26, intended to rape Riley when he attacked her on the intramural fields complex and bludgeoned her with a rock. Ibarra was arrested in a nearby apartment building the next day.

Ibarra, who entered the U.S. illegally in September 2022, was convicted of all charges, which include murder, aggravated assault with attempt to rape, kidnapping and tampering with evidence.

Ibarra was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

In his campaign for the White House, Trump and his Republican allies turned the case into an indictment of President Joe Biden's immigration policies, stoking fears of rampant crime by foreigners streaming into the U.S. unlawfully.

What do opponents and supporters of the bill say?

On Tuesday, the American Civil Liberties Union said in a statement that passage of the bill could threaten civil liberties.

"This is the first immigration bill of the new Congress, and if passed, it will strengthen President-elect Trump's hand in unleashing mass deportations on our communities," said Sarah Mehta, ACLU's senior border policy counsel. "It will force immigration authorities to detain individuals accused of nonviolent theft offenses like shoplifting regardless of whether or not law enforcement even deems them as a threat."

The ACLU also sent a letter to Congress on Monday urging lawmakers to vote against the bill.

University of Georgia students mourn the loss of Laken Riley, who was murdered on campus on Feb. 22, 2024, and Wyatt Banks, a UGA freshman who died by suicide on campus on Feb. 21, at the UGA Tate plaza on Feb. 26, 2024. JOSHUA L. JONES/USA TODAY NETWORK

"This is the first immigration bill of the new Congress, and if passed, it will strengthen President-elect Trump's hand in unleashing mass deportations on our communities."
Sarah Mehta
ACLU's senior border policy counsel

"It is a slippery slope to start with the mandatory, prolonged detention of our longtime residents who have been accused of, though perhaps not even charged with, criminal offenses – sometimes decades-old charges," the letter said.

Supporters of the bill say that if it had been in law in 2024, Riley might still be alive today.

"The bill directly addresses one of the federal policy failures related to Laken Riley's murder. Her murderer, Jose Ibarra, is an illegal alien who had been previously cited for shoplifting by the Athens Police Department," House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana said in a statement. "If local law enforcement had called ICE, and ICE issued a detainer and picked him up, Laken would be alive."

Senate Democrats begin to show their support

After the bill passed in the House of Representatives, Senate Democrats have begun to express their support for the measure, increasing the likelihood of it reaching the president's desk.

Freshman Democratic Sen. Ruben Gallego of Arizona expressed his support for the act Wednesday in a post on social media.

"Arizonans know better than most the real consequences of today's border crisis. We must give law enforcement the means to take action to prevent tragedies like what occurred to Laken Riley," Gallego said.

Other Democrats have expressed their support for the bill, with spokespeople for Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona, Gary Peters of Michigan and Dave McCormick of Pennsylvania confirming their support to USA TODAY.

Georgia Sen. Jon Ossoff told CNN he would vote to advance debate of the bill in the Senate. A spokesperson for Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine said the senator was still "reviewing the legislation."

Delaware Sen. Chris Coons said he "supports proceeding with the Laken Riley Act but has concerns with the bill that he hopes will be addressed during a robust amendment process," a spokesperson said.

Contributing: Jorge L. Ortiz and Jeanine Santucci

More veterans exposed to burn pits eligible for coverage

Biden extends benefits for those with cancer

Cybele Mayes-Osterman
USA TODAY

The Biden administration expanded benefits for veterans with cancer believed to be linked to burn pits where tens of thousands of service members were exposed to toxic waste.

The new step, announced by the White House on Wednesday, expands the PACT Act, a 2022 law that widened access to benefits and care for veterans exposed to burn pits used to dispose of trash and waste on military bases.

The new step lowers the burden for veterans deployed to the Middle East during the Gulf War and after 9/11 to prove certain cancers are related to their service. If they are approved for disability benefits, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) fully covers their related cancer treatment.

PACT "has been transformational and has enabled VA to serve more veterans, more quickly than ever before," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

The Biden administration expanded benefits for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits. PROVIDED BY THE U.S. MARINES

Biden believes his son Beau's cancer came from Iraq burn pits

For Biden, the law also has a personal dimension. The president has said he believes the brain cancer that killed his son Beau at age 46 in 2015 stemmed from exposure to burn pits while he served in Iraq.

After he was sent to Iraq in 2008, Beau Biden served at Balad Air Force Base, where as much as 200 tons of waste was burned every day in one of the country's largest burn pits, according to Pentagon estimates.

The Biden administration estimates that tens of thousands of veterans diagnosed with the newly added cancers will become eligible for benefits over the next decade, a senior official said. Over that time, the expansion is budgeted at $4.5 billion.

Rejected veterans can reapply for benefits

The expansion took effect last week for some cancers and will take effect for others this week. It applies to veterans who served beginning on Aug. 2, 1990, and covers acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, cancers of the bone marrow and cancers of the bladder and urinary tract, according to the department.

Veterans whose claims for those cancers have been denied should reapply, the department said.

Tens of thousands exposed in Iraq, Afghanistan

Disposing of trash in open-air burn pits was a common practice, especially at U.S. bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, which together burned trash in more than 270 pits in 2010, according to an estimate by the U.S. Defense Department's Central Command.

Another Pentagon estimate found large bases produced 60,000 to 85,000 pounds of waste a day. Waste burned in the pits included chemicals, plastic, rubber, paint, medical waste and feces. The pits produced toxic fumes that soldiers at the bases inadvertently inhaled, which had short and long-term consequences on their health.

Thousands of soldiers exposed to the toxic pits later reported they had contracted serious health problems, including respiratory and neurological conditions, and cancer.

But the VA had not codified any connection between burn pits and these health problems, a link the department website says researchers are still "actively studying." Many veterans exposed to the pits were repeatedly denied coverage for treatment.

After decades of advocacy efforts and campaigns, the PACT Act linked 23 respiratory conditions and cancers to burn pits, expanding eligibility for veterans diagnosed with those illnesses. It also required that health officials provide toxic exposure screenings at all VA medical appointments.

Exposure at asbestos pit in Kuwait

Had she been diagnosed after the PACT Act, Cpl. Katie Benson would not have had to "fight the VA" to have her cancer connected to her service, said her husband, Sri Benson.

The former Army medic from Portland, Oregon, died three years after she was diagnosed, at 35, with biphasic mesothelioma. Her diagnosis of a rare cancer caused by asbestos exposure came a decade after she had been exposed to an asbestos pit at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait.

"Deployment killed her. We just didn't know it yet," Sri Benson said.

But because the condition was rare, her husband said, "the VA was just like, 'Oh, we can't treat you.'" She eventually resorted to private coverage.

K2 veterans covered in new expansion

In the two years since the act passed, more than 1 million veterans and their survivors have received disability benefits under the law, according to the VA.

But other veterans still struggled to get coverage for their conditions.

They included some veterans who served at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, or K2, a former Soviet base in Uzbekistan bordering Afghanistan where more than 15,700 servicemembers were deployed between 2001 and 2005, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The base was contaminated with a toxic mix of chemicals and radioactive material left over from its years under Soviet rule. Environmental assessments picked up uranium levels 24,000 times higher than those found in nature, according to data obtained by The Associated Press. Cyanide was found in the showers and jet fuel in the soil, according to the nonprofit DAV, formerly Disabled American Veterans. A 2015 U.S. Army study found veterans stationed at the base had a 500% greater chance of developing cancer than their colleagues who hadn't been there.

In 2023, veterans groups sued the Pentagon seeking information about contamination of the base. And "The Daily Show" host Jon Stewart, who advocated for the PACT Act, returned to lobby last year for the VA to cover K2 veterans' illnesses caused by radiation exposure.

The plaintiffs identified in the suit are included in the new expansion, and the VA promised last year to expand benefits for K2 veterans diagnosed with "multi-symptom illness" and other unexplained conditions. More than 13,000 K2 veterans are enrolled in VA health care, including more than 11,800 whose conditions are linked to their service, according to the department.

The 31-year wait

The work of expanding the PACT Act and establishing links to additional conditions isn't done.

The senior administration official said the findings of some studies initiated by the PACT Act may not be available until 2027.

Waiting for these links to be made is not a new phenomenon.

A study from DAV and the Military Officers Association of America found it takes the VA an average of 31.4 years for servicemembers' exposure to a toxic chemical to be acknowledged by the government.

Since Katie Benson's death, her husband has been advocating for veterans suffering from illnesses after burn pit exposure. Sri Benson also works for the American Legion as a veterans health policy analyst. The process of getting more conditions covered comes down to "political pressure," he said. "They have to raise their voice and make a stink."

Contributing: Donovan Slack

Week in review

Recapping the most important and talked about news this week from around the world – ICYMI

NEWS

Biden opens up on his legacy

President Joe Biden says he could have won reelection, but he's not sure he would have been physically able to complete another four years in office, he told USA TODAY's Susan Page in an exclusive interview. One of his biggest regrets, he said, was his failure to effectively fight misinformation. "I hope that history says that I came in and I had a plan how to restore the economy and reestablish America's leadership in the world," Biden said.

OPINION

Alcohol warning long overdue

As he prepares to leave office, Dr. Vivek Murthy, the U.S. surgeon general, has released an important advisory connecting alcohol use and cancer. His advisory reflects a central theme – that we are a stressed-out and unhappy society, where too many people resort to destructive behavior. Murthy has not chosen alcohol by accident; its use skyrocketed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Something needs to be done, beginning with altering the perception that a small amount of daily alcohol is actually good for you. Dr. Murthy is right to start now.
– Dr. Marc Siegel, Opinion contributor

MONEY

Rule restrains credit reports

An initiative announced by the the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau would bar medical bills from being included on credit reports, effectively preventing debt collectors "from using the credit reporting system to coerce people," the agency said Tuesday. The rule would remove $49 billion in medical debt from the credit reports of 15 million Americans. "People who get sick shouldn't have their financial future upended," bureau director Rohit Chopra said. Opponents say the changes will ultimately harm consumers by leading lenders to extend credit borrowers can't afford to carry.

IMAGE OF THE WEEK

Somber duty

Staff Sgt. Alexis Horta tends to Bullet in Fort Myer, Va., where the U.S. Army Caisson Detachment prepared to escort President Jimmy Carter's casket to lie in state Tuesday at the U.S. Capitol.

MEGAN SMITH/ USA TODAY NETWORK

LIFE

Golden Globes cozy up to 'The Brutalist'

Awards season kicked off in earnest Sunday with the Golden Globes, where the period epic "The Brutalist" positioned itself for the Oscars by winning best drama, best actor for Adrien Brody and best director for Brady Corbet. The Spanish-language crime comedy "Emilia Pérez" also boosted its Oscar cred with four Globes, including best comedy/musical. Fernanda Torres was a surprise winner for best drama actress in "I'm Still Here," and Demi Moore was named best comedy/musical actress for "The Substance." The Oscars are awarded March 2.

SPORTS

Netflix jumps into the wrestling ring

Netflix took another giant leap into live sports with its debut of WWE's iconic Monday Night Raw, featuring fan-favorite stars, a hype-worthy match card and enough mayhem to satisfy any wrestling fan. Rhea Ripley beat Liv Morgan to reclaim the Women's World Championship; CM Punk pinned longtime rival Seth Rollins; Jey Uso stunned Drew McIntyre; and Roman Reigns speared Solo Sikoa for the right to wear the coveted ula fala. Other highlights: John Cena began his farewell tour, The Rock dropped in, and Hulk Hogan got booed.
– Compiled by Robert Abitbol

HISTORY
IN THE MAKING

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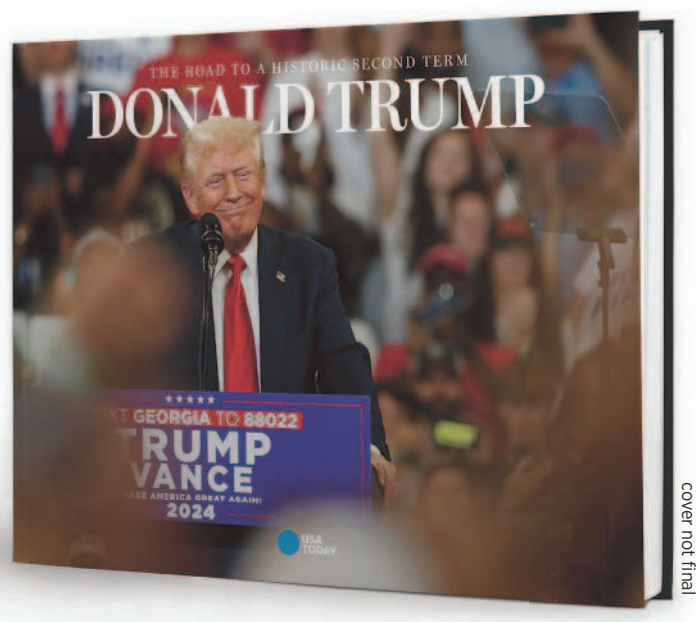

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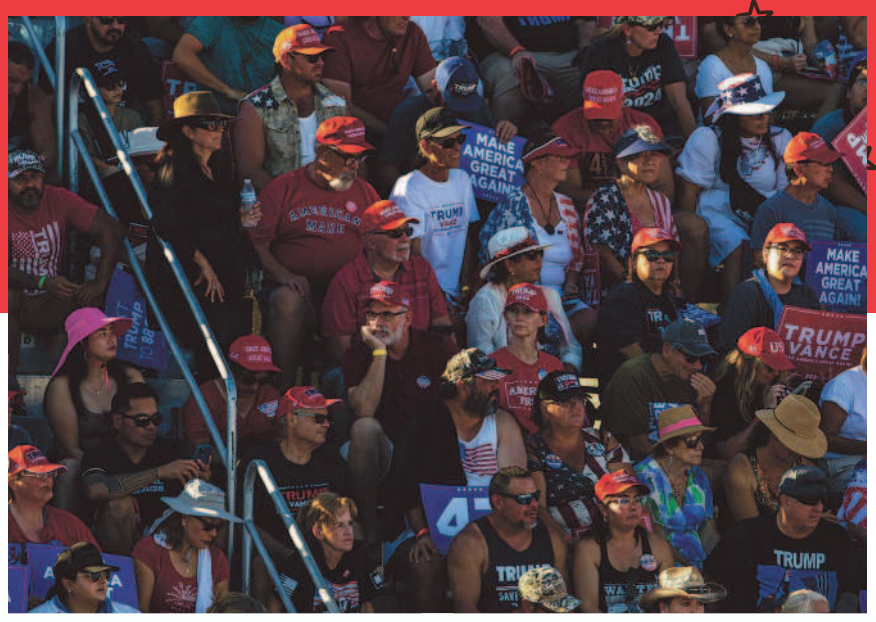

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Trump's list of invitees for Jan. 20

President-elect loves populists, strongmen

Josh Meyer
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – It's no secret President-elect Donald Trump likes populist leaders – often praising them for breaking norms and doing what it takes to get things done.

Now, as Trump breaks another norm – and American political tradition – by inviting foreign presidents and prime ministers to his Jan. 20 inauguration, these firebrands are at the top of his list.

The latest to confirm an invite is former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who said Wednesday he's hoping to head to Washington for Trump's swearing-in. Here's a list of who else Trump has invited:

Former President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil: In a post on the social media platform X, Bolsonaro said his lawyer "has already forwarded a request ... to get my passport back so that I can attend this honorable and important historical event."

The former leader, dubbed Trump of the Tropics, has been indicted for plotting a coup in 2022 to stay in office following his reelection defeat. His passport was confiscated in February 2024 after Brazilian authorities indicted him and dozens of others as part of an alleged conspiracy to "violently dismantle the constitutional state."

The conspiracy included an alleged plan to assassinate the current president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, before he took office in January 2023, authorities say.

President Xi Jinping of China: Trump has invited Xi to attend but so far he's declined in favor of sending a delegation on his behalf. Trump has publicly praised Xi as a "strong man," a "King" who "controls 1.4 billion people with an iron fist" and "president for life." "I think it's great," Trump said in 2018. "Maybe we'll give that a shot someday." The invitation is considered especially unprecedented given that Xi is the communist leader of one of America's chief geopolitical rivals.

President Javier Milei of Argentina: Milei, one of the first foreign leaders to meet with Trump in person after his 2024 victory, reportedly plans to attend. Trump once called the far-right libertarian politician and former TV commentator, elected in November 2023, his "favorite president," in part, for wanting to slash spending to tame inflation. Like Trump, he enjoys attacking his political rivals as "parasites" and "thieving politicians" and Argentina's Congress as "the rat's nest."

President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador: Bukele, a far-right populist leader with ties to the Trump camp, is accused of committing massive human rights violations, including thousands of arbitrary detentions. He assumed a second term in June despite a constitutional prohibition in El Salvator of consecutive reelection and reformed the electoral system to consolidate his power. Bukele has yet to announce whether he'll attend, but Donald Trump Jr. was a guest of honor at Bukele's inauguration last year.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary: One of Trump's longest and strongest foreign allies, Orban reportedly is 'still considering' if he'll attend. Since his 2010 reelection as president, Orban has been accused of undermining democracy, weakening judicial independence and vastly increasing corruption in Hungary. Trump welcomed Orban to Mar-a-Lago after his election win. Trump's U.S. supporters have embraced Orbán's approach as a blueprint for his second term.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy: Trump invited Meloni to his inauguration, and also to Mar-a-Lago for a surprise dinner and a movie last weekend, praising her as a "fantastic woman. She's really taken Europe by storm." Meloni opposes LGBTQ+ and abortion rights and has vowed to set up naval blockades to block migrants from reaching Europe. Her party's flag features a tricolor flame popularized by dictator Benito Mussolini and she still uses a slogan favored by fascists – "God, Fatherland and family."

Two other far-right leaders who have not, at least reportedly, been invited to Trump's swearing-in: Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un.

TikTok

Continued from Page 1A

the high court blocks a federal law requiring TikTok break its ties with the Chinese government or be banned in the U.S. on Jan. 19.

Yet, court watchers are doubtful the justices will overturn a lower court's decision upholding the law.

That unanimous ruling was made by judges appointed to the bench by both Republican and Democratic presidents. And their agreement across ideological lines echoes the law's broad bipartisan support in Congress.

Plus, the national security justifications for the law are likely to be persuasive to the justices, said Gautam Hans, a Cornell Law School professor and associate director of the school's First Amendment Clinic.

"They are fairly reluctant to second guess the decisions of the political branches on that weighty topic," said Hans, who signed onto a brief supporting TikTok but isn't optimistic the free speech concerns will win out.

The government warns that unless TikTok is divested from ByteDance, its Chinese-based parent company, China can gather data on Americans or manipulate the content on TikTok to shape U.S. opinion.

President-elect Donald Trump has muddied the executive and legislative branches' united backing of the law by asking the court to pause it until he has a chance to find another solution after taking office on Jan. 20.

But legal experts, as well as the Justice Department – which encouraged the Supreme Court to ignore Trump's request – said the president-elect doesn't have a persuasive legal argument for putting the law on hold.

The court has already deferred deciding – until after arguments are made in person – TikTok's request that the law's Jan. 19 deadline be paused. It's a sign that a majority of the justices don't think TikTok will be able to successfully argue that the law is unconstitutional, said Saurabh Vishnubhakat, a professor at Cardozo School of Law.

The court could issue a decision soon after Friday's arguments.

In written filings previewing the case, the two sides disagree on whether freedom of expression is at stake, if there are other ways to address the national security concerns and whether those concerns are legitimate.

Here's a look at their differences.

1st Amendment violation?

The Justice Department argues the law doesn't infringe on freedom of expression because it targets TikTok's control by a foreign adversary, not speech protected by the 1st Amendment.

Congress' goal of protecting Americans' data from being misused by China has nothing to do with expression, the department wrote in a filing. And the goal of preventing China from using TikTok to shape U.S. opinion or spread disinformation doesn't violate the Constitution because "a foreign sovereign has no First Amendment right to covertly manipulate a U.S. platform."

Lawyers for TikTok's content providers say they have a 1st Amendment right to speak to other Americans with the help of a foreign publisher. Their use of TikTok, they said is no different from an actor making a movie with a foreign director or an author putting out a book with a British publisher.

Banning TikTok unless it takes on a new owner "plainly imposes a burden on the free flow of ideas," the lawyers wrote. Even under a new owner, they said, TikTok would lose its distinct look and feel.

Are there better options?

Even if the justices agree that the law infringes on free speech rights, they can uphold it if they find that it's narrowly tailored to achieve an important goal.

TikTok argues the "time-tested, least-restrictive" way to address concerns about content manipulation is to require a disclosure warning to users. For the data concerns, the government could prohibit TikTok from sharing sensitive user data with a foreign adversary. That could be enforced by the Federal Trade Commission using heavy fines, lawyers for TikTok users wrote.

The Justice Department counters that they won't be able to detect a data breach until it's too late.

"The Chinese government has a documented history of collecting data through hacking operations that violate U.S. laws," Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar told the court. "The First Amendment doesn't require the government to rely on a potential agreement with a party that it doesn't trust."

She also said a generic disclosure to TikTok users about the risks of content manipulation by China would be "patently ineffective."

What's the security threat?

TikTok says the government has yet to prove that there's a significant national security risk that needs to be addressed.

The Justice Department is overstating China's interest in TikTok's data and understating the company's ability to protect itself from foreign influence, TikTok's lawyers told the court.

In fact, they said, the government has conceded it has no evidence of wrongdoing and has made "no effort to explain why this dog has never barked."

The Justice Department said China pre-positions "ostensibly private companies subject to its control" in other countries so it can deploy them at opportune moments.

As long as TikTok can be controlled by a foreign adversary, the government argues, its reams of data about Americans remains a powerful tool for espionage, and TikTok's role as a key channel of communication makes it a potent weapon for covert influence operations.

China, the Justice Department said, "could use those weapons against the United States at any time."

Debris covers the ground in Pacific Palisades on Thursday. Fire officials said water shortages hit the neighborhood west of downtown Los Angeles the hardest on Wednesday. DANIEL COLE/REUTERS

Water supply

Continued from Page 1A

fires in recent memory, killing at least five and destroying at least 1,000 homes, businesses, and other structures.

"We had a tremendous demand on our system. ... We pushed the system to the extreme," Janisse Quiñones, CEO of the LA Department of Water and Power, said at a news conference Wednesday. "If there's a message to take away from me today, it's I need our customers to really conserve water."

Firefighters on Thursday continued to battle wildfires across Los Angeles as more than 180,000 residents were ordered to flee. At least five fires were active in Los Angeles County, scorching more than 40 square miles across the region, according to Cal Fire.

Water shortages hit Pacific Palisades, a neighborhood west of downtown Los Angeles that stands at a higher elevation, the hardest, Quiñones said Wednesday.

At the other end of the dry firemen's hoses stood people's blazing houses.

Osbee Sangster is a 73-year-old resident who fled her Los Angeles-area home at 3:30 a.m. local time Wednesday. She noticed a conspicuous absence as fire trucks rolled through her neighborhood, mandating evacuations.

"Where was the water?" she told the USA TODAY Network while at the Pasadena Convention Center, where about 700 people – and pets – fleeing the fires gathered.

Bowen Xie, a spokesperson for the water management agency, said workers had filled all 114 of the city's water storage tanks before the fires ignited. The agency responded to the water shortages by deploying trucks carrying up to 4,000 gallons of water to areas where firefighters had challenges using hydrants.

Bowen said the agency deployed seven trucks at midnight local time Wednesday and an additional 11 trucks later in the morning.

Pasadena City Fire Department Chief Chad Augustin acknowledged the water system problems but downplayed the impact.

"When you have multiple city blocks on fire ... we are going to stretch our water system," he said at a news conference Wednesday. "But I'll be clear, we could have had much more water, with those wind gusts we were not stopping that fire."

The water supply problem was made worse by power outages, he added.

Extreme Santa Ana winds have hindered firefighting operations and spread the fires that began breaking out earlier this week. Officials said the winds had eased somewhat Thursday, but the National Weather Service said critical fire weather could last through Friday.

There were some breakthroughs. Firefighters gained the upper hand on the Sunset Fire that forced mandatory evacuations in Hollywood and the Hollywood Hills – including iconic locations such as the TCL Chinese Theatre and the Hollywood Walk of Fame. All evacuations from that fire were rescinded, authorities said.

Erik Scott, a spokesperson for the Los Angeles Fire Department, acknowledged the water supply issue Wednesday.

"We did experience some challenges with water pressure while battling the Pacific Palisades Fire," the fire captain said on social platform X. "The extreme demand caused a slower refill rate for these tanks which created a challenge for our firefighting effort."

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass also urged residents to conserve water.

"We want to make sure we are ready if we need more water," she said at a news conference Wednesday.

The issues with the water supply will require a possible reengineering of the system, Quiñones said, as climate change-induced drought threatens to bring even more devastating blazes.

Contributing: Dinah Voyles Pulver, Thao Nguyen, John Bacon and Jeanine Santucci USA TODAY; McKenna Mobley, USA TODAY Network

OPINION

WANT TO COMMENT?
We're on Facebook (USA TODAY Opinion) and Instagram and X, formerly Twitter (@usatodayopinion). You can also comment directly on columns.

On TikTok ban, I agree with Biden, not Trump

Nicole Russell
USA TODAY

A former CIA officer you probably have never heard of was sentenced last year to 10 years in prison for spying for the Chinese government. Alexander Yuk Ching Ma had admitted to an undercover FBI agent that he sold U.S. secrets to China.

But persuading CIA operatives to betray the United States isn't the only way that the Chinese government quietly mines information about our nation and its citizens.

ByteDance, a company affiliated with the Chinese government, operates TikTok, which collects data on 170 million eager American users.

Even worse, according to FBI Director Chris Wray's testimony before Congress, TikTok is a national security threat because the Chinese government can use the app to peddle propaganda and false information to users.

China might even be able to use TikTok to hack Americans' phones and other devices.

Why the Supreme Court will hear case on a TikTok ban

Last year, Congress passed, and President Joe Biden signed, legislation that bans TikTok in the United States if parent company ByteDance doesn't sell the popular app by Jan. 19.

But the U.S. Supreme Court plans to hear arguments Friday on whether the ban is constitutional.

In light of the threat it poses, I'm surprised at the number of Americans – including President-elect Donald Trump – who support TikTok's continued use in the United States.

Opponents of the law claim that the federal government is interfering with Americans' First Amendment rights and punishing one social media giant to the benefit of others.

But the case against TikTok is strong, and the Supreme Court should allow the law – which requires the app to divest from its China-based parent company or it will be banned from app stores and web hosting companies in the United States – to be enforced.

The push to ban TikTok has bipartisan support, including from former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who served in Trump's first term.

John F. Plumb, the principal cyber adviser to the secretary of Defense, describes TikTok as a "potential threat vector" to the United States. In 2023, Plumb told a House Armed Services subcommittee that China, using TikTok, might be able to spread misinformation and collect data on a massive swath of Americans.

'A concern we have with regards to who controls that data'

Army Gen. Paul Nakasone, commander of U.S. Cyber Command, also testified about the dangers of the app: "If you consider one-third of the adult population receives their news from this app, one-sixth of our children are saying they're constantly on this app, if you consider that there's 150 million people every single day that are obviously touching this app, this provides a foreign nation a platform for information operations, a platform for surveillance, and a concern we have with regards to who controls that data."

Congress thought TikTok was such a threat that the legislation to block it passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support – 352 votes for the ban and only 65 against it.

Other popular social media apps like Facebook and Instagram have their own issues, including collecting users' digital footprints and allowing sexual predators to lurk on their platforms.

ByteDance, a company affiliated with the Chinese government, operates TikTok. OLIVIER DOULIERY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

But there's strong evidence that TikTok shoves pro-China propaganda into the faces of young Americans who spend hours each day on the app.

A study conducted by researchers with Rutgers University's Network Contagion Research Institute found that concerns about China using TikTok to indoctrinate America's youth are rooted in reality.

Joel Finkelstein, the institute's cofounder and chief science officer, told The Free Press that their study establishes that "TikTok is actively manipulating perceptions of China and the Chinese Communist Party through algorithmic bias."

China uses TikTok to reshape Americans' opinions of the communist country, including casting its human rights record in a more positive manner.

The app also downplays negative content about China, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and the horrendous treatment of Uyghurs.

The Supreme Court is likely to weigh First Amendment protections against the national security risk. If the federal government's lawyers can show that TikTok is a true national security threat, they could persuade the conservative justices, who are stalwart First Amendment defenders, to their side.

I'd argue that the United States has a vested interest in ensuring that a foreign government, or a company partially owned by a foreign government, isn't allowed to spread propaganda to millions of Americans through their personal devices.

The Department of Justice, arguing in defense of the ban, noted that "the First Amendment would not have required our Nation to tolerate Soviet ownership and control of American radio stations (or other channels of communication and critical infrastructure) during the Cold War, and it likewise does not require us to tolerate ownership and control of TikTok by a foreign adversary today."

Trump reveals he chooses popularity over national security

This is a rare instance in which I agree with the Biden administration instead of Trump, who has asked the court to delay enforcement of the law so the incoming president can pursue "a political resolution."

Trump, on Truth Social, revealed the real reason why he doesn't want TikTok banned. He posted a graphic that shows his popularity on the platform.

Like X, TikTok ebbs and flows with accurate and false information, controversies and conspiracies. It's a cesspool. But Trump doesn't mind a cesspool as long as people love him in it.

Trump missed a good opportunity to put America first. Instead, he prioritized his own popularity.

That isn't surprising.

But it is disappointing.

Nicole Russell is an opinion columnist with USA TODAY. She lives in Texas with her four kids.

Why does Blake Lively have to be likable to be believed?

Sara Pequeño
USA TODAY

When "It Ends With Us" premiered last August, fans noticed something was amiss after lead actors Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni failed to promote the film together.

It turns out that this was a small glimpse of a much larger legal battle brewing between the two.

Now, TikTok is ablaze with videos summarizing the legal challenges both actors have made. The videos and comments, which have taken over the actual movie, skew heavily in support of Baldoni, who also directed the film.

"This is mean girl Blake coming out," Talk TV commentator Samara Gill said in a video summarizing Baldoni's lawsuit against The New York Times. "It didn't go her way. She tried to fight it, but Baldoni is showing he's not going to back down."

Lively files legal complaint on sexual harassment and retaliation

Seeing these videos fills me with the same sense of dread I had watching the discussion of the Johnny Depp v. Amber Heard trial, and it's depressing to see this story follow the same narrative.

It's another instance of a woman needing to be "the perfect victim" to have her concerns taken seriously.

I'm not Lively's biggest fan. I didn't enjoy "Gossip Girl"; I've never seen "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants." I don't care about her marriage to Ryan Reynolds or her friendship with Taylor Swift. Lively's repeated gaffes make me less likely to watch her filmography.

What I feel about Lively, however, is not relevant to whether her co-star and director sexually harassed her.

Sexual harassment allegations should not be ignored just because you dislike an actor.

Last month, Lively filed a legal complaint against Baldoni, producer Jamey Heath and others who worked on the movie, alleging sexual harassment and retaliation.

Producer Blake Lively stars as Lily Bloom and director Justin Baldoni stars as Ryle Kincaid in "It Ends With Us." NICOLE RIVELLI/SONY PICTURES

In the complaint, Lively alleges that Baldoni improvised kissing scenes, entered her dressing room while she was naked, added sex scenes to the script, talked about his past pornography addiction and described his genitalia: all things Lively says she did not consent to. Lively says she brought these issues up during filming.

Wayfarer, the studio co-founded by Baldoni and Heath, responded by hiring a full-time intimacy coordinator and implementing other safeguards.

After filming, the men hired Melissa Nathan, a crisis management expert who has worked with Depp, Drake and Travis Scott. In her legal complaint, Lively alleges that the public relations strategy was to damage her reputation.

Adapted from the Colleen Hoover book of the same name, "It Ends With Us" is a story about domestic violence. In the movie, Lively's character, Lily Bloom, falls for Baldoni's character, who is physically abusive.

When the movie came out, people criticized Lively for neglecting the film's subject matter seriously. Instead, articles and internet users pointed out that she appeared to be using it to sell her hair care line.

That criticism is valid, but it doesn't change whether she experienced sexual harassment on set.

The day after her complaint was filed, The Times published a story with the headline " 'We Can Bury Anyone': Inside a Hollywood Smear Machine," which detailed the complaint Lively made against Baldoni and highlighted just how much influence PR professionals have on our perception of those in the entertainment industry.

"He wants to feel like she can be buried," a publicist texted Nathan on Aug. 2, according to Lively's legal complaint.

"You know we can bury anyone," Nathan replied.

On Dec. 31, Baldoni sued The Times for $250 million over the article, claiming that The Times failed to criticize Lively's "self-serving narrative" and included a "defamatory headline designed to immediately mislead the reader."

Baldoni's lawyer has said that they also intend to sue Lively.

Baldoni's lawsuit doesn't mean Lively's accusations are false

I won't lie: Baldoni's lawsuit makes it seem like Lively was difficult to work with. But I don't think that it's the smoking gun people assume it is, or that her initial accusations are false.

It just means that this story is complicated. The posts on TikTok are an echo chamber for every person who hates Lively, the person we seem to have forgotten claims to have been sexually harassed by her coworker.

What's depressing is that women so often experience this. It was just a few years ago that we lived through Depp v. Heard and witnessed the way social media can determine how a victim is perceived. Heard has acknowledged that the barrage of negative posts about her possibly swayed the jury.

"I'm not a good victim," Heard told Savannah Guthrie in 2022 after the trial wrapped. "I get it. I'm not a likable victim, I'm not a perfect victim. But when I testified, I asked the jury to just see me as human."

Or, as Nathan described it in one text: "People really want to hate on women."

It's up to the courts to decide how these legal challenges will play out, but the court of public opinion can determine what happens to Baldoni's and Lively's careers. I might not care for Lively, but she deserves to be treated with the same respect that any victim of sexual harassment deserves.

Follow USA TODAY columnist Sara Pequeño on X, formerly Twitter: @sara__pequeno

USA TODAY

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2025 tax season brings about new things to fill out

How to get your documentation in order to give to your tax preparer (if you have one). **Page 5B**

LIFELINE

WPA POOL GETTY IMAGES

THEY SAID WHAT?
PRINCE WILLIAM

"To the most incredible wife and mother. The strength you've shown over the last year has been remarkable." – Prince William in a message wishing a happy birthday to his wife, Princess Kate, who turned 43 on Thursday. A photo accompanying the statement on the Prince and Princess of Wales' Instagram account showed Kate in a light shirt, dark jeans, a shepherd check scarf and a dark jacket. William added that he and their children George, Charlotte, and Louis "are so proud of you." Kate is coming off a challenging year following her cancer diagnosis and treatment. The Princess of Wales announced that she completed chemotherapy in September.

IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY
WHO'S CELEBRATING TODAY

Reneé Rapp is 25. **Pat Benatar** is 72. **Rod Stewart** is 80.

HOROSCOPE | SANCTUARY
More: www.sanctuaryworld.co

Aries (March 21-April 19). Struggling to put your vision into words? Blame the moon's clash with Venus! Getting sentimental will work in your favor.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Throwing caution to the wind? Friendly outings put a dent in your budget!

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Catching the side-eye? Be mindful of your presentation. First impressions can only be made once.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Feeling wistful? The moon's clash with Venus makes you long for the romance of days gone by!

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Where is this relationship going? You want straight answers, but those are hard to come by.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Making concessions? Make sure they're the right ones as the moon and Venus clash. Dare to be selective.

Libra (Sept.23-Oct. 23). Working on everything but your work? You follow inspiration at the expense of productivity.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Do you trust them? Paranoid inklings provoke questionable behaviors.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Harmony at home? You're disinclined to stir the pot, even though it might need stirring ...

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Scattered focus? The moon's clash with Venus inspires you to prioritize relationship-building over your to-do list.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Letting your inner child call the shots? Doing so can get expensive!

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Putting it off? As the moon and Venus clash, work can wait! At least that's what you tell yourself ...

MOVIES

Jonno Davies, left, stars as Robbie Williams and Nick Nicolas as Tom Jones in the Williams biopic, "Better Man."
BEN KING/PHOTOS PROVIDED BY PARAMOUNT PICTURES

'Better Man' is a 'ride you've never seen'

Melissa Ruggieri USA TODAY

Robbie Williams calls himself a "professional attention seeker." • He isn't aw-shucks-ing his way through this self-diagnosis as a way to categorize his immense success in Britain, first as a member of stadium-packing boy band Take That and, since his 1997 debut solo album, as a superstar with dozens of Top 10 hits in the U.K. • No, Williams is correct. He craves attention. And for decades, his persona as the Bad Boy of Pop was intertwined with serious real-life issues including drug and alcohol abuse and extreme depression.

Williams dissected his demons in an eponymous Netflix series in 2023 that was sometimes painful to watch as he wrestled with his self-esteem with raw reactions and stinging honesty.

His complicated, colorful life has been cast in a more fantastical way in "Better Man," the new film directed by Michael Gracey ("The Greatest Showman") that opens in theaters on Friday.

The movie contains plenty of music biopic tropes, but they happen to be true: A small-town kid is dabbed with fate's wand, becomes immensely successful, can't handle success, caves to addictions, goes solo, fills stadiums with hyperventilating fans enraptured with his sublime pop anthems, tries to earn the love of his cabaret-singing dad, and adores his primary supporter, his grandmother.

But there is a variation to "Better Man" that immediately spotlights its unconventionality.

Williams is portrayed not as a human, but as a monkey.

Audiences will hear Williams' voice, but that is Davies portraying him as a monkey in "Better Man."

Robbie Williams says the monkey depiction is 'genius'

In a recent video chat, Williams – still boyish-looking at nearly 50 and fit in his sleeveless white T-shirt exposing his numerous tattoos – says he was "completely and utterly obsessed" with Gracey's idea that his musical biography depicts him as a monkey (well, technically a chimpanzee because the character has no tail.)

It was a brainstorm borne from more of Williams' self-abasement when he would often tell Gracey, with whom he became friends during "The Greatest Showman" period, "I'm just like a performing monkey."

Gracey credits Williams for not asking for anything to be cut from the film, even the more unscrupulous parts of his story. Gracey also notes he was never concerned with the way his man-as-monkey idea would be accepted by audiences or film studios, but understands why "Better Man," which took more than five years to complete, might be a hard sell.

"With any musical, the real world is not people walking down the street and breaking into song," Gracey says in a separate video call. "So basically you have the first 10 minutes of a film to set that contract with the audience. You need to have someone break into song so they understand this is the contract we're setting ... we were setting the contract that it's not just a musical, but also a monkey, and once you're on board, you don't think about it."

Williams "thought it was genius," he says. The perplexing choice "has done what it was supposed to do, which is to get people talking and be contentious. I would say it's about eight to 12 minutes where the audience is going, 'What?' and then you completely forget and

See 'BETTER MAN', Page 4B

STREAMING

Alan Cumming tells all on 'The Traitors'

David Oliver
USA TODAY

Spoiler alert! We're discussing some details from the first three episodes of "The Traitors" Season 3, so beware.

Lying. Scheming. Backstabbing.

No, we're not talking about a daytime soap opera. We're talking about Season 3 of "The Traitors" (first three episodes now streaming on Peacock, then weekly). "Traitors" is the reality series that invites contestants to a remote Scottish castle for twisted mind games and physical challenges. And it's hosted by none other than the scheming Scot himself, Alan Cumming.

Well, Cumming, 59, isn't quite as devilish in real life. "I am the host, but I'm playing a character of a host, very much so," he says. "I don't even sound like that; I put on a funny accent as well as a look and tone." In real life, "I don't go around quoting Shakespeare all the time, and I certainly don't boss people around. And I'm not so aggressive as this sort of stern castle daddy."

Alan Cumming, host of "The Traitors" accepts the award for outstanding reality competition program at the Emmys last year. He also won for his hosting duties.
JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY NETWORK

Cumming (and his fabulous fashion choices) are synonymous with the show at this point. He won his first Emmy for hosting the series' second season after being nominated for his role as Eli Gold on CBS' 2009-16 legal drama "The Good Wife." His extra-thick accent, peppered with whispers and quippy quotes at the ready, is half the fun of watching.

In fact, he's "acting a storm more than even I did on 'The Good Wife,' probably."

See TRAITORS, Page 4B

MUSIC

Top 12 (in no order) Latin albums of '24

Edward Segarra and Pamela Avila USA TODAY

The soundtrack of 2024 turned us into swaggering cowgirls, tortured poets and rave-ready brats. But there were plenty of éxitos that kept listeners moving, too. ● The world of Latin music churned out a steady stream of repeat-worthy albums, which saw releases from established stars Shakira and Reik to rising stars Young Miko and Grupo Frontera. Whether you were fist-bumping to "BZRP Music Sessions #53" or crooning away your heartache to "Por Qué Será," there was no shortage of raw emotion and infectious anthems. ● Latin artists also made their way into the history books. In 2024, 13 Latin songs amassed 1 billion streams each on streaming giant Spotify, including the Daddy Yankee classic "Gasolina" and Karol G and Peso Pluma's sultry reggaeton banger "QLONA." ● To celebrate all la música, here are USA TODAY's picks for the top 12 Latin albums of 2024, in no particular order.

Kali Uchis, 'Orquídeas'

Grammy-winning powerhouse Kali Uchis trades in her mellow neo-soul sound for icy grooves and frenetic abandon. The album, Uchis' follow-up to her Spanish-language debut, "Sin Miedo (del Amor y Otros Demonios)," pulses with the same ethereal sensuality that made "Telepatía" a hypnotic crossover hit. Despite the higher BPM, the Colombian American singer's jazzy soprano glides over the hip-swiveling beats, offering a soulful danceability that can be taken to the club or a late-night drive. – *Edward Segarra*

Standout tracks: "Igual que un Ángel" featuring Peso Pluma, "Muñekita" featuring El Alfa and JT, and "Labios Mordidos" featuring Karol G.

Shakira, 'Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran'

Forget about the revenge dress. Shakira delivers an entire runway of romantic angst on "Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran," her 12th studio effort and first release since her high-profile breakup with longtime boyfriend Gerard Piqué. Shakira takes fans on a cathartic journey traversing anger, sorrow and unbridled lust. The Colombian superstar's confessional lyrics are buoyed by an eclectic soundscape of EDM, reggaeton, bachata and regional Mexican styles. The She Wolf's howl is as piercing as ever. – *Segarra*

Standout tracks: "Puntería" featuring Cardi B, "Monotonía" featuring Ozuna, and "Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53" featuring Bizarrap.

Young Miko, 'Att.'

After the release of her debut EP "Trap Kitty" and breakout Feid duet "Classy 101," Young Miko channels her hip-hop charisma for a proper introduction on her first album, "Att." The Puerto Rican emcee's breezy flow and buttery vocals help her land clever punchlines and knockout songs. Dynamic collaborations with Jowell & Randy, Elena Rose, Villano Antillano and other stars add texture to Miko's raps. And with unapologetic odes to queer romance peppered throughout her lyrics, Young Miko is the refreshing voice Latin music needs. – *Segarra*

Standout tracks: "Wiggy," "Princess Peach" and "Curita."

Grupo Frontera, 'Jugando a Que No Pasa Nada'

Grupo Frontera has cemented their place as one of the rising voices in Mexican music with the 12-track "Jugando a Que No Pasa Nada." The sextet stays true to their cumbia, tejano and norteño roots but also prove they can easily make a country, pop, reggaeton-esque or R&B hit. Fronted by crooner Adelaido "Payo" Solís and with the help of Grammy-winning producer and songwriter Edgar Barrera, Grupo Frontera delivers a short but sweet sophomore album that delves into heartache, yearning and partying the pain away as sung in the opening track "F*CKIN AMOR." – *Pamela Avila*

Standout tracks: "POR QUÉ SERÁ" featuring Maluma, "QUÉDATE BEBÉ" and "ME HIZO UN FAVOR"

Reik, 'Panorama'

Sometimes you just need a good 'ol ballad to belt out, and Reik's "Panorama" delivers. The Mexican group – Jesús Alberto Navarro Rosas, Julio Ramírez Eguía and Gilberto Marín Espinoza – is back to their pop roots and sounding better than ever, with infectious disco-inflected tracks. With groovy, electro-pop sounds

With "Cosa Nuestra," Rauw Alejandro is entering a new era, leaving the galactic vibes of "Saturno." PROVIDED BY SONY LATIN

reminiscent of Harry Styles' "Harry's House," Reik's first studio album since 2019's "Ahora," proves it is best listened to windows down, cruising down the coast. – *Avila*

Standout tracks: "No Molestar," "Abril" and "Vámonos a Mi Casa" featuring LAGOS.

Nathy Peluso, 'Grasa'

Nathy Peluso is a fearless chameleon on her sophomore offering "Grasa." The Grammy-nominated singer and rapper serves up more of the genre-bending alternative pop that made her debut album, "Calambre," a fiery revelation in 2020. Singing over gruff hip-hop beats and ethereal minimalist ballads, the Argentine singer weaves a tale of self-discovery with diaristic lyrics that excavate self-acceptance, intense romance and emotional maturity. This bewitching fusion of introspection and avant-garde musicality solidifies Peluso's status as one of Latin music's brightest trailblazers. – *Segarra*

Standout tracks: "La Presa," "El Día Que Perdí Mi Juventud" featuring Blood Orange and "Aprender a Amar."

The Marías, 'Submarine'

The Marías blessed us with an ethereal, hypnotic album meant to be devoured and emotionally dissected. With their second studio album, "Submarine," the LA-based band returned to their psychedelic indie rock genesis, but it has also catapulted them into global territory. From a Coachella 2025 gig to a sold-out arena tour with Billie Eilish, 2024 was transformative for the band. In fact, change was the thesis for "Submarine" as the 14-track bilingual album traverses loneliness, isolation, freedom and healing. "Submarine" will have you defiantly singing along to an ex with "Run Your Mouth," then back in the throes of post-breakup loneliness with "Lejos de Ti" and rip it out once more with the introspective, melancholy "No One Noticed." – *Avila*

Peso Pluma, 'Éxodo'

Peso Pluma is aware of his global star power, even likening himself to Bruce Wayne, the wealthy American playboy who is Batman's alias. "Me siento Bruce Wayne porque en el Lambo' ya me han visto, en las noches como un vampiro," he croons. For his fourth studio album, the 25-year-old flexed just how many collaborations he could squeeze into the 24-song tracklist. Pluma tries his hand at rap and hip-hop with Cardi B, Quavo, Rich the Kid and DJ Snake. But he's at his best belting corridos tumbados with his Mexican music contemporaries Natanael Cano, Gabito Ballesteros, Tito Doble P and Junior H. – *Avila*

Becky G rediscovers herself on "Encuentros," an album that serves as a sequel to her regional Mexican debut "Esquinas." PROVIDED BY ACOUSTYLE COMMUNICATIONS

Standout tracks: "LA DURANGO," "VINO TINTO" and "BRUCE WAYNE."

Ivan Cornejo, 'Mirada'

Ivan Cornejo is only 20 years old, but with the way he hauntingly sings of heartbreak, you'd think he has lived a thousand lifetimes. With "Sale Para Ser Feliz," the Mexican American crooner begins his third studio album, "Mirada," singing of a lost love and the pitfalls of a life without *the one*. Cornejo pulls his weight all on his own with no collaborations or features, showcasing his growth as an artist. Sticking to his signature sierreño sad-boy vibe, Cornejo blends música Mexicana, corridos and alternative rock, taking us on an introspective journey of the highs and lows of amor. – *Avila*

Standout tracks: "Intercambio Injusto," "Dónde Estás" and "Aquí Te Espero."

Becky G, 'Encuentros'

Rooted in the warmth of family ties and cultural pride, Becky G rediscovers herself on "Encuentros," an album that serves as a sequel to her regional Mexican debut "Esquinas." The project, inspired by Becky's Mexican roots and the death of her grandfather Miguel, bursts with emotive lyrics that earnestly capture the euphoria and agony of love. Becky's cutting lyricism is bolstered by a soulful sound that ranges from angsty corridos tumbados and aching balladry to experimental fusions and sprightly cumbia-pop. "Encuentros" is a riveting reminder that Becky G is at her best when she sings from her corazón. – *Segarra*

Standout tracks: "Como Diablos," "Otro Capítulo" and "Ultima Vez."

Rauw Alejandro, 'Cosa Nuestra'

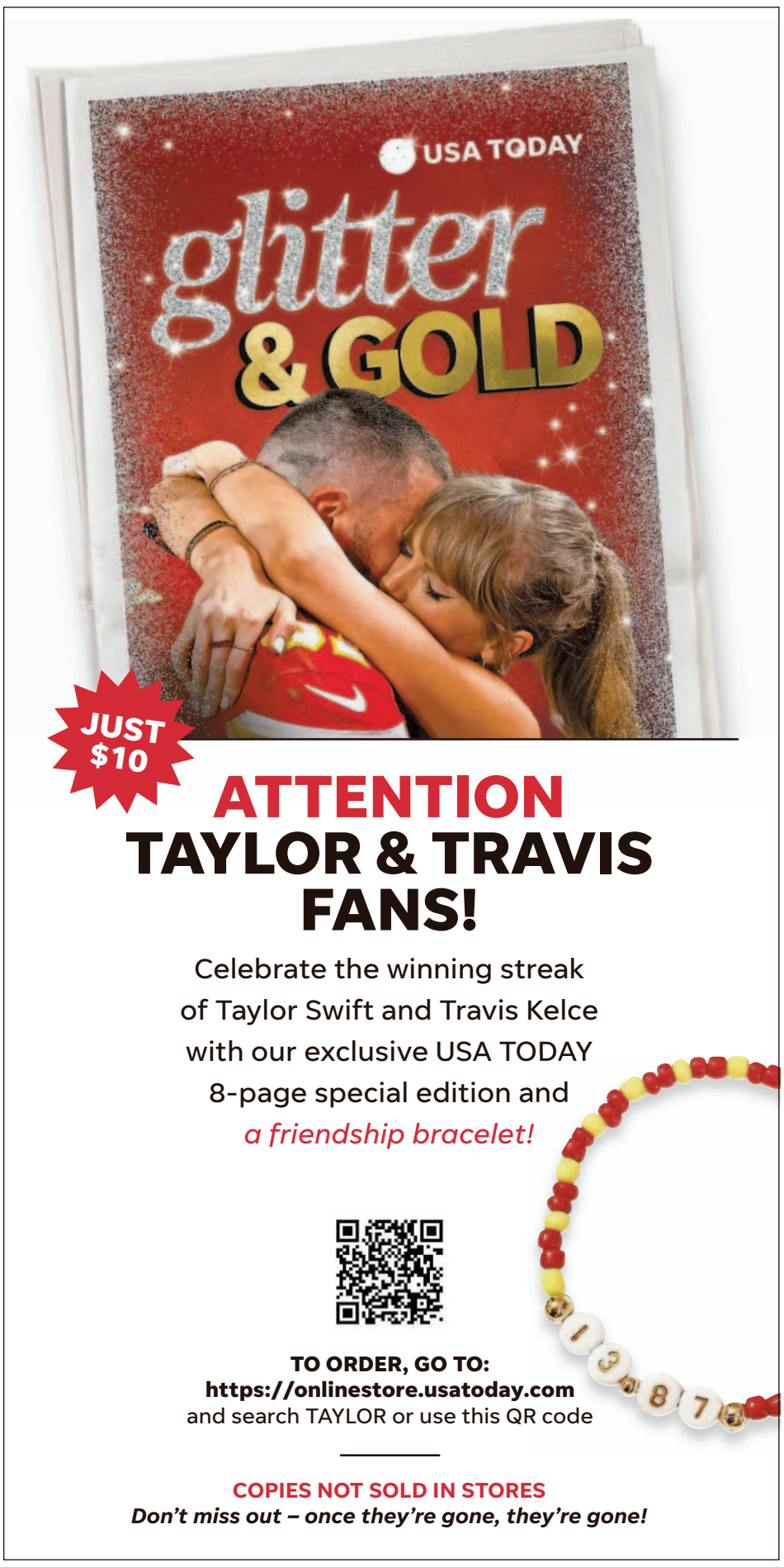
Alejandro's "Cosa Nuestra" is the Puerto Rican superstar's first project after his breakup with Spanish singer Rosalía, and while heartbreak is present, the project feels more like a celebration and homage to the sensual, sultry sounds of salsa romántica of 1970s New York. Putting the perreo on the back burner – not to be confused with his undeniable sex appeal – Alejandro proves his ability to shape-shift and tap into new territory seamlessly. – *Avila*

Standout tracks: "Qué Pasaría..." featuring Bad Bunny, "Tú Con Él" and "Ni Me Conozco."

Manuel Turizo, '201'

Manuel Turizo brings heart to the party on "201," a warm and dance-friendly album that draws inspiration from the childhood festivities of Turizo's native Colombia. While the 12-track LP ricochets between the infectious rhythms of various Latin genres, from bachata and mambo to reggaeton and salsa, Turizo's smooth baritone and romantic lyrics tie the songs together for a collection that's as energizing as it is feel-good. The Latin Grammy-nominated singer's charismatic guest list, which includes Yandel, Grupo Frontera and Elder Dayán Diaz, strengthens the album's communal feel.– *Segarra*

Standout tracks: "Qué Pecao" featuring Kapo, "Sígueme Besando Así" and "La Ex de mi Amigo" featuring Elder Dayán Diaz.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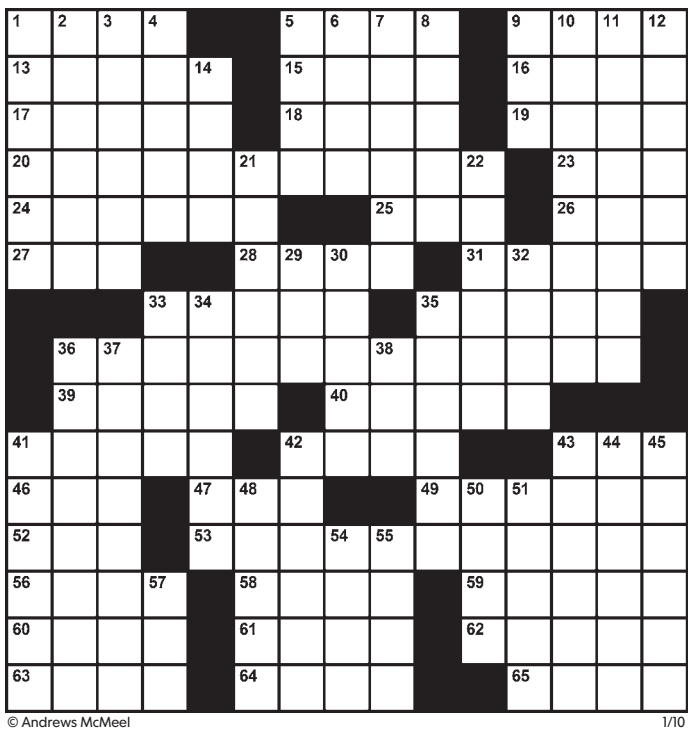

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ACROSS
1 Grp. whose peak season is between Black Friday and New Year's
5 Shipshape
9 Picket line crosser
13 Fantasy football data
15 Cookie with a "Mega Stuf" variety
16 Let up
17 Squabble
18 Like cherished memories
19 "At Last" singer James
20 Tight-fisted accountant
23 Sewn edge
24 78 feet, for a tennis court
25 The "A" in IPA
26 Mineral deposit
27 UFO occupants
28 "Kiss the ___" ("The Little Mermaid" song)
31 Logically sound
33 Worked for Uber
35 Places to nosh on latkes
36 Oldest surviving work of Islamic architecture
39 Turn over
40 Currency featuring Ghandi
41 System of beliefs
42 Dependable choice
43 Spoil
46 Solo who loved Leia
47 "___ goes there?"
49 Williams who wrote "On the Line"
52 World's busiest airport, for short
53 Casserole often eaten during Passover
56 Souls and Fortes, for example
58 Fairy tale baddie
59 Top-tier
60 Repetitive way of learning
61 "A man, a ___, a canal: Panama" (famous palindrome)
62 Evil creature
63 Once more
64 Where to find clappers, gaffers and grips
65 1996 musical based on "La Boheme"

DOWN
1 Still in working order
2 Rodeo Drive, for one
3 Source of some Halloween and Christmas traditions
4 Was very hurtful
5 Mapo ___ (Sichuan dish)
6 Metal extracted from 26-Across
7 Tooth-related
8 Alpine song
9 Catch a glimpse of
10 Like the pope
11 Symbol above 8 on a keyboard
12 Smiled ear-to-ear
14 Splinter group
21 "What a relief"
22 Idolize
29 Procedure that aids with conception
30 Back in fashion again
32 Sunburn-soothing ingredient
33 Hit up privately on social media
34 Fame
35 Oust from office
36 Time span
37 Sign outside some diners
38 Simple dwelling
41 Point of spiritual energy in the body
42 Bing competitor
43 Government in power
44 2,000 pounds
45 "The big ___ is persistence" (Octavia E. Butler quote)
48 B-ball
50 ___ out (barely obtained)
51 King or queen
54 "Curses!"
55 Camera part
57 Do some stitching

Thursday's Answer

B	A	G	E	L	■	A	C	D	C	■	F	R	A	T
A	I	O	L	I	■	C	H	A	R	■	L	O	P	E
A	R	O	M	A	■	M	A	N	I	■	O	U	R	S
■	■	F	O	R	G	E	T	A	B	O	U	T	I	T
O	C	T	■	■	A	S	S	■	B	A	R	E	L	Y
P	A	R	I	T	Y	■	■	E	A	T	■	■	■	■
T	R	O	T	S	■	■	P	A	N	G	■	P	O	S	H
I	G	O	T	A	B	E	T	T	E	R	I	D	E	A
C	O	P	Y	■	A	R	M	S	■	U	N	D	E	R
■	■	■	■	A	R	T	■	■	S	T	A	M	P	S
E	N	D	I	N	G	■	E	R	S	■	■	A	S	H
Q	U	I	N	T	A	B	R	U	N	S	O	N	■	■
U	R	N	S	■	■	M	E	A	L	■	L	O	O	S	E
I	S	E	E	■	E	L	S	E	■	A	Z	U	R	E
P	E	S	T	■	S	L	E	D	■	M	E	T	A	L

1/9

Answers: Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.

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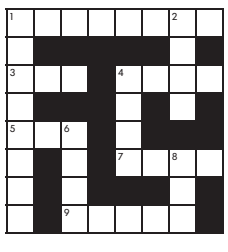

1/10

Across
1. 72462628
3. 423
4. 4245
5. 339
7. 3339
9. 68449

Down
1. 72463767
2. 2743
4. 4293
6. 9276
8. 379

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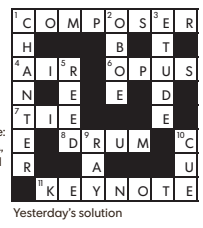
Today's theme
Weather

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues. For example: 2 could be A, B or C ... and 5678 could be LOST



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Yesterday's solution

Numbers

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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

				8	3			
2				9	1			
1		8		6			2	
		2		4		1		
8	5						6	4
		9		5		2		
	4			2		5		6
			6	3				7
			4	7				

1/10

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

SUDOKU FUSION ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

	2	3		1	
		1			
	3		5		
		2		4	
			6		
	6		1	3	

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

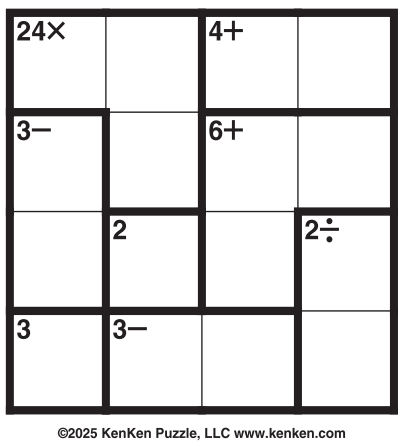
Thursday's Answers

4	6	2	7	8	5	1	9	3
9	1	5	6	2	3	8	7	4
7	3	8	4	9	1	2	5	6
3	2	9	8	6	7	5	4	1
1	4	6	3	5	9	7	2	8
5	8	7	1	4	2	3	6	9
8	5	4	2	1	6	9	3	7
6	9	3	5	7	8	4	1	2
2	7	1	9	3	4	6	8	5

4	2	5	3	1	6
3	1	6	4	5	2
1	5	4	2	6	3
2	6	3	5	4	1
5	3	1	6	2	4
6	4	2	1	3	5

1/9

KENKEN



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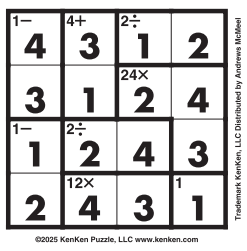
1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 though 6 (challenging) without repeating.

2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.

3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



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KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo Difficulty: **MEDIUM**

	40	25	44	27
37	12			11
41		16	8	
31		1	14	
27	7			4

Solution to Thursday's puzzle

6	1	3	2
9	8	4	16
15	11	5	12
7	13	14	10

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

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Words

WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 1/10

Find and Circle:
Five chess pieces ☑□□□□
Four punctuation marks □□□□
Three six-letter birds □□□
"Call of the Wild" author (first/last name) □□
Mysterious region: ____ Triangle □

Thursday's answer: PASTEURIZE MANEUVER SLEUTH FEUD / CELLO PIANO FLUTE BANJO / SPRUCE CEDAR PINE / GREEK LATIN HINDI / PUPIL

P	C	C	B	L	O	H	C	J	A	C	K			
W	A	B	O	E	O	S	Y	O	R	R	R			
D	N	W	I	M	R	N	P	P	L	N	N			
O	A	R	N	S	M	M	D	R	H	O	G			
I	R	D	W	D	H	A	U	O	E	E	N			
R	Y	F	A	L	C	O	N	D	N	Y	N			
E	Q	U	E	E	N	Z	P	Q	A	N	Y			
P	K	N	I	G	H	T	R	O	O	K	V			

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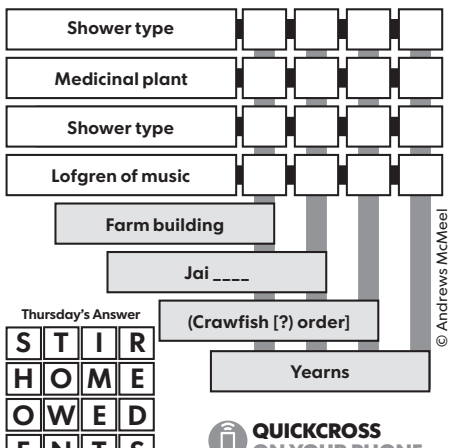
QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes 1/10



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Thursday's Answer

S	T	I	R
H	O	M	E
O	W	E	D
E	N	T	S

1/9

QUICKCROSS ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 1/10

1. **BETTY**
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____ **PLAYER**

Clues:
1. "Golden Girls" star
2. Sign of surrender
3. Noncontact sport
4. Gridiron
5. Sport played on grass
6. The Canadiens, for one
7. Cooperative athlete

Thursday's Answer

SOLID	GROUND
GROUND	LEVEL
LEVEL	BEST
BEST	WESTERN
WESTERN	UNION
UNION	JACK
JACK	BLACK

PLAY ONLINE PUZZLES.USATODAY.COM

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BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Fifty percent
5 Distributes cards
10 Venomous snakes
14 Inter —
15 Relative by marriage (Hyph.)
16 Azure
17 Holiday song
18 Annoyance
19 Racer in a fable
20 Tooth-related
22 Pirate (2 wds.)
24 Sense of self
25 Recipe instruction
26 Highest ranking
30 Frozen dessert
34 "I — — Camera"
35 Less common
38 — Haute
39 Lean
41 Carries
43 Easier said than —
44 Spud
46 Public tantrum
48 Metal container
49 Rollerbladed
51 Goes and gets
53 This place
55 Type of cuckoo
56 Partygoers
60 "The — Kid"
64 On — — (equivalent)
65 Mountain ridge
67 Tor
68 Factor in heredity
69 Engine
70 Golden State sch.
71 Pip
72 Captures
73 Molt

DOWN
1 Round of applause
2 — vera
3 Claim on property
4 Be unsteady
5 Foreign official
6 Dir. letters
7 Festivals
8 Washes
9 Workout clothing
10 Felt loathing for
11 Eastern European
12 Unadulterated
13 Prophet
21 Golden- —
23 Wild disturbance
26 Epsom —
27 Simple boat
28 Boiled food
29 Desire personified
31 Soup
32 Bert's Muppet friend
33 Youngsters
36 Catchall abbr.
37 Coral ridge
40 Restrained by a leash
42 Gym wear
45 Bobbin
47 Lab burner
50 Imagined
52 Three-ring event
54 Blunder
56 From — to riches
57 Fencing weapon
58 Windmill blade
59 Plant bristle
61 Chief
62 Yarn
63 "Holy cow!"
66 Outdo

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

P	A	C	T	S	■	A	G	E	D	■	A	W	L	■
A	L	L	A	N	■	R	O	L	E	■	S	O	U	R
S	T	O	R	E	■	M	E	E	T	■	B	E	L	A
T	O	T	T	E	R	■	S	C	A	R	E	S	U	P
■	■	■	A	R	E	S	■	T	I	E	S	■	■	■
B	O	A	R	■	M	A	D	■	L	A	T	E	S	T
I	L	L	■	■	I	R	I	S	■	D	O	L	O	R
T	I	T	I	■	T	A	X	E	D	■	S	I	L	O
E	V	A	D	E	■	H	I	R	E	■	■	T	A	P
S	E	R	E	N	E	■	E	G	G	■	S	E	R	E
■	■	■	O	I	L	S	■	E	A	C	H	■	■	■
S	C	A	L	D	I	N	G	■	S	H	O	R	T	S
T	O	N	O	■	C	O	A	L	■	A	W	A	R	E
S	A	N	G	■	I	R	M	A	■	R	E	V	U	E
■	T	O	Y	■	T	E	E	M	■	T	R	E	E	S

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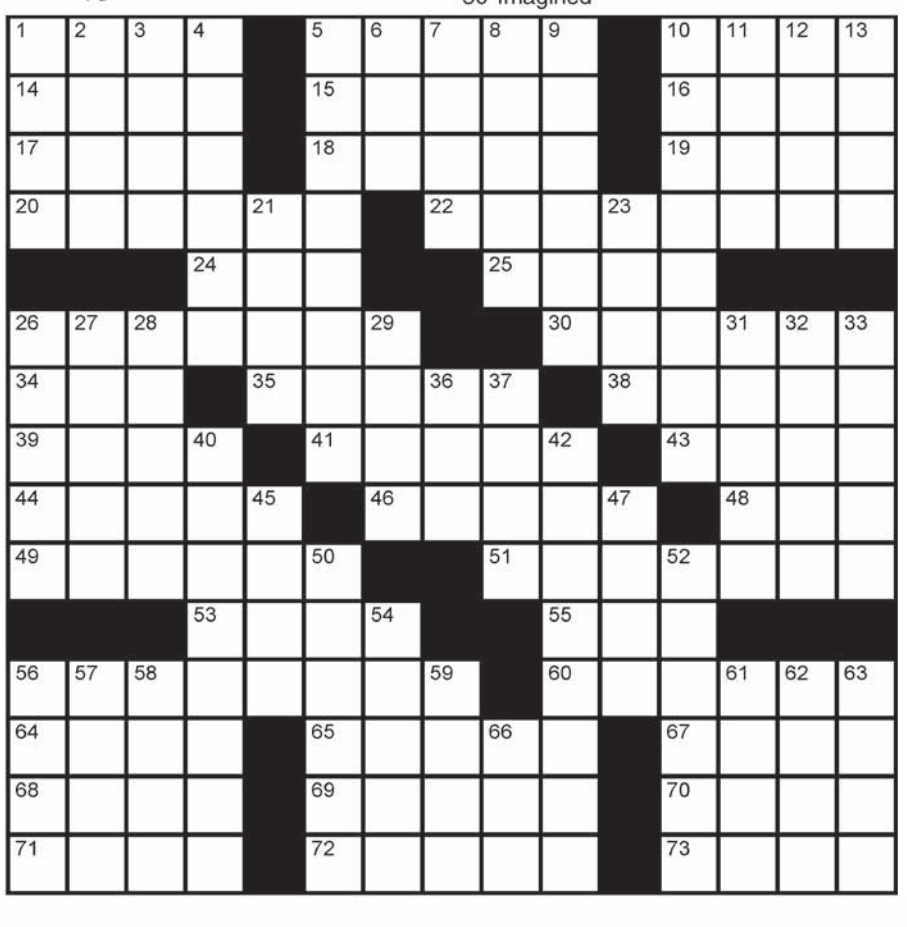

QUICKCROSS

© Andrews McMeel

Thursday's Answer

S	T	I	R
H	O	M	E
O	W	E	D
E	N	T	S

1/9

QUICKCROSS ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

DON'T QUOTE ME®

Comedian Demetri Martin jokes about a modern convenience.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
DOWN FELL HALF HOUR STAIRS TRIPPED

"I _____ ON AN ESCALATOR AND ___ ___ THE _____ FOR AN ___ AND A ___." 1/10

Thursday's Answer: "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read." - James Baldwin

© WIGGLES 3D GAMES

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 Haiti comprises half of it (10)	
2 they may bounce (6)	
3 possible work option (6)	
4 electrical voltage adapter (9)	
5 "Edmund Fitzgerald" singer (9)	
6 "fine and dandy" (5)	
7 Great Lakes or Spice Girls (8)	

HI	TER	CHE	AN	REM
LA	OOT	OME	LIG	FIV
HTF	LL	CON	CKS	IO
OTE	ES	SP	SWE	VER

Thursday's Answers: 1. DISCARDED 2. FOMO 3. SETTLERS 4. WINDED 5. MIKE 6. MIDNIGHT 7. BOOKENDS 1/10

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JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

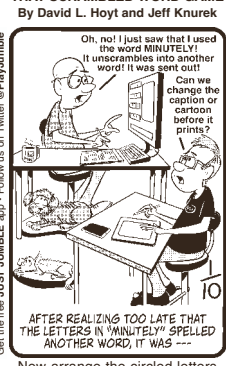
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

PNTIU

ZIAME

LUYEPR

DEULXP


Oh, no! I just saw that I used the word MINUTELY! It unscrambles into another word! It was sent out!
Can we change the caption or cartoon before it prints?
AFTER REALIZING TOO LATE THAT THE LETTERS IN "MINUTELY" SPELLED ANOTHER WORD, IT WAS ---

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: _____

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: CONCH MOUND ABLAZE BEAUTY
Answer: When they got together midday at the deli, it was a — LUNCH-N-"MEET"

MOVIES

Brody cries accepting award amid wildfires

Brendan Morrow
USA TODAY

NEW YORK – Oscar hopefuls gathered on the East Coast for another awards season stop on Wednesday, but the tragic events out west weren't out of mind.

Adrien Brody was awarded best actor for "The Brutalist" at the glitzy New York Film Critics Circle Awards gala, his latest honor after he took home a Golden Globe on Sunday.

In his speech, Brody cried while speaking about the deadly wildfires that have devastated Los Angeles, leaving at least five dead.

"I would be remiss to not mention the weight of what's on all of our minds and in our hearts tonight," the actor said. "It's been a heavy day for me. It's always hard to accept something like this when there's so much suffering in the world. My heart goes out to all the families and the animals and our colleagues."

An emotional Brody continued, "This is our community. I just want to thank and commend the bravery of the first responders, and the sacrifices and their meaningful work that deserves our recognition tonight. My thoughts are with everyone affected by this horrific event."

The events in California were mentioned by several honorees throughout the evening, including "Anora" director Sean Baker, who received the best screenplay award. "All of our hearts and prayers should be with those being affected by the LA fire," he said at the top of his speech.

While introducing Baker, "The Dead Don't Die" director Jim Jarmusch said the crisis is "brought to you by climate deniers," adding that while some are "telling us that 'woke' is a negative thing, I would just like to say it's time we wake" up.

"The Brutalist" was named best movie by New York film critics, another big win for the 3 ½-hour epic that received the best drama film Golden Globe on Sunday.

Robert Pattinson made a surprise appearance to hand the award to director Brady Corbet, whom he worked with on the film "The Childhood of a Leader." In his speech, Corbet recalled how it took him and his wife "years to rebuild" after his house burned down eight years ago.

Director Brady Corbet, left, and Adrien Brody attend the New York Film Critics Circle Awards on Wednesday in New York City.

New York Film Critics Circle full list of winners:

Best film: "The Brutalist"

Best director: RaMell Ross, "Nickel Boys"

Best screenplay: Sean Baker, "Anora"

Best actress: Marianne Jean-Baptiste, "Hard Truths"

Best actor: Adrien Brody, "The Brutalist"

Best supporting actress: Carol Kane, "Between the Temples"

Best supporting actor: Kieran Culkin, "A Real Pain"

Best foreign language film: "All We Imagine as Light"

Best cinematography: Jomo Fray, "Nickel Boys"

Best nonfiction film: "No Other Land"

Best first film: "Janet Planet"

Best animated film: "Flow"

Kieran Culkin attends the New York Film Critics Circle Awards on Wednesday in New York City.
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL LOCCISANO/GETTY IMAGES

"My heart is with absolutely everyone in Los Angeles County," he said.

Culkin gets emotional over Danes' 'incredibly kind' speech about him

Is anyone having a better awards season than Kieran Culkin?The "Succession" star picked up the best supporting actor award for "A Real Pain" at NYFCC, his third award in four days after winning at the Golden Globes on Sunday and the National Board of Review Awards on Tuesday.

The honor was presented by Claire Danes, his co-star in the 2002 movie "Igby Goes Down." She described Culkin as "one of the most alive, most dexterous, most kinetic actors in this and every town" and reflected on their long relationship.

"We've been doing this a long time," she said. "When we worked together on 'Igby Goes Down,' we were children. We now have children. So many of them. What is going on?"

The "Homeland" star added that Culkin is a "marvel" and closed, "Congratulations, my friend. You deserve this and so much more."

Upon taking the stage, Culkin appeared thrown off by how emotional he was about Danes' introduction, though he still took the opportunity to get in a sarcastic dig, quipping, "That was incredibly kind. I wish I was listening."

Striking a more serious tone, he said, "God, that was really nice. I don't even know what to do. I'm just going to drink my martini and try to process that. You are a very, very lovely person. I love you a lot."

Baker says mom 'hates' his movies, told him not to make 'Anora'

Accepting the award for best screenplay for "Anora," Baker told critics that "my mother wouldn't agree with your choice" to give him the award.

"That's true. I don't think she even made it through 'Red Rocket,'" he said, referring to his 2021 film. "After she saw half of it, she asked me what was next, and I pitched 'Anora' to her over the phone, and she literally said, 'Sean, people don't want to see that!'"

"I love my mom. She's the best and actually, she's why I'm here because she introduced me to cinema. She just hates my movies."

Baker got big laughs after he proceeded to read an excerpt of the "Anora" screenplay – which was just the phrase "Ani and Ivan have sex" multiple times with new locations swapped in.

"You guys just awarded that best screenplay," he joked. "You can't take this back!"

Contributing: Thao Nguyen

'Better Man'

Continued from Page 1B

you're taken on a ride that you've never seen."

Who plays the monkey in 'Better Man'?

While the singing in "Better Man" is all Williams - "Let Me Entertain You," "Feel" and his biggest stateside hit, "Angels," make appearances – the monkey symbolizing Williams is all Jonno Davies, with the help of Weta Workshop.

The British actor known in the U.S. for his role in the TV series "Hunters" spent his time on set in a jumpsuit studded with motion capture markers as well as 101 "dots" on his face and a helmet camera to capture every eyebrow raise, chin stroke and rubber face pulled as Williams' embodiment. The performance was augmented by some computer-generated images with a high-resolution digital scan of Williams' eyes being placed over Davies' in post-production.

Davies, who saw Williams in concert with his parents as a 9-year-old, never spent time with his real-life counterpart. But studying videos and simply growing up with Williams' aura in pop culture informed his performance.

"It was hard not to be a fan of his as a kid," Davies, 32, says in another video call. "But it was the essence of him that I really wanted to capture. Because it's a monkey, we didn't have to ask the audience to go for his likeness. It was more about filling space like he does; the way he enters a room and the energy changes."

Davies also had to participate in choreography, most notably in the film's most spectacular segment, a roving romp through London's Regent Street set to the throbbing pop-funk of Williams' 2000 hit, "Rock DJ."

The scene took a year and a half to manifest, as Gracey needed the blessing of the Westminster City Council, the Crown Estate (Regent Street is royal land) and permission to close a bus route for four nights.

The cast, including 500 dancers for the production, rehearsed for a week in a studio space recreated to model the famous London street and was ready to film when Gracey received a call. Queen Elizabeth II had died and the shoot was off.

"All of the money we paid and the shops we booked and the crew and everything, that money was all gone," Gracey said. It took five months to raise additional funds and much arguing with studio types more versed in arithmetic than art who suggested Gracey simply cut the number.

"I said, 'You don't understand, this is the centerpiece musical number of the film,'" Gracey says, adding the delay also led to a postponed release of "Better Man," which debuted in December in Gracey's native Australia. "There were such enormous obstacles to this film ever seeing the light of day that every time it plays I grin and think, 'People have no idea how close this came to never happening'."

Robbie Williams talks new album

Williams is aware that despite the echelon of fame in his homeland that almost leveled him many times, America has always been a difficult market to conquer.

"Many people already know my story and lots of people are reviled by me, not many are indifferent and some really love me," Williams says. "So (in the U.S.) it's going to be incredibly interesting how we get this story across."

Along with gamely plowing through extensive promotion for "Better Man," Williams is also finishing a new album – he declines to name a release date "because I haven't got one yet" – that includes a high-octane rocker with legendary Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi and Deep Purple alumnus Glenn Hughes.

And though he performed a well-received residency at Wynn Las Vegas in 2019, Williams is ambivalent about his next moves.

"I did those shows at the Wynn as a busman's holiday and to scratch an itch. But the plan was to grow it and COVID came along and my concentration and other projects came up and off I went," Williams says. "I'd love to show off for everybody in (the U.S.) to a greater extent than I've been able to. But if my movie is yet again met with indifference, then I will find it very difficult to have the enthusiasm to do anything."

Traitors

Continued from Page 1B

'Lord of the Flies' with Botox

Cumming is the constant in the U.S. iteration of the British franchise where "faithful" players vie against "traitors" for a cash prize of up to $250,000. The traitors – mostly stars from other reality TV series – gather and pick faithful people to "murder," while the faithful players (and traitors among them) banish people they worry are deceiving them. While a reality show, it exists in a world far from it.

"As it goes on, people get more and more sort of maddened and irrational because they're in this sort of bubble and they think of nothing else," Cumming teases.

The new crop of contestants in Cumming's spooky castle includes Chrishell Stause ("Selling Sunset"), Wells Adams ("Bachelor in Paradise"), Sam Asghari (Britney Spears' ex-husband) and Dorinda Medley ("The Real Housewives of New York City"). And if the initial episodes are any indication, be prepared for as cutthroat a season as ever: "sort of like 'Lord of the Flies' with Botox," Cumming says.

Would Alan Cumming play a traitor or faithful?

This season's original traitors are Bob The Drag Queen ("RuPaul's Drag Race"), Carolyn Wiger ("Survivor") and Danielle Reyes ("Big Brother"), and "Boston Rob" Mariano ("Survivor") later joins the group.

"There's fireworks and conflict galore in the turret," Cumming says, as each of their strong personalities collide.

The first traitors' "kill" this season is Medley, a disappointment for "Real Housewives" fans who revel in her penchant for drama and chaos.

"It's such a departure from the reality that I've done on the 'Housewives,' you know, where you run your own show," she says. "This is completely out of your control, and you really are taken into a new world. And that's it. The knives fall as they may, and you have no control over it, and half the time don't know what's going on, and because they create such the environment of intensity, you're in it."

She "never would have expected" being killed off first, "and dare I say, I think I'm going to be missed because I had a lot of good content I was going to put out there."

If given the chance, Cumming would love to play a traitor himself. That said, after hearing a traitor's rationale later this season, "I would never have thought of any of (that). I wouldn't have had a clue, and I would have just sort of gone with my gut." That's how he approaches his work, too.

His career has spanned all kinds of roles across many genres and mediums, from TV shows like "Good Wife" and "The L Word" to movies ("Spy Kids," "Josie and the Pussycats" and "GoldenEye") and musicals ("Cabaret"). People recognize him for all of the above, but the fan interaction that stands out most is someone telling him "I love your soap," referencing a fragrance he had out at the time. A diversified portfolio indeed.

'It's a really terrifying time'

Cumming's 60th birthday is Jan. 27, with his husband Grant Shaffer's to follow a few months later. He plans to relax in a spa for a few days on his own before planning dance party after dance party after dance party, including at his New York club, aptly called Club Cumming. It's a haven for the LGBTQ+ community, something that clicked for him early in the COVID-19 pandemic when bars went dark and "devastated" patrons.

"It is a community, and it is a space that I feel we've created where it's absolutely about kindness, and people of all sorts can come together and feel not judged and feel protected. And we are going to need those spaces more and more and more, I fear, in the next four years," he says, referring to the reelection of Donald Trump as president.

As flamboyant and fun as he is on "Traitors" and in life, Cumming knows what's at stake.

"It's a really terrifying time," he adds of concerns about Trump's impact on queer and especially transgender rights. "So even in the sort of bubble of liberal New York, people are scared, and I'm myself wondering how long it will be before I feel uncomfortable."

Tips for insurance claims after wildfires in Southern Calif.

Home and business owners should approach it as a business transaction, experts say. **Page 7B**

You can check the headlines from your home state or city

We survey and compile the top news stories from all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. **Page 8B**

MONEYLINE

ANGELA WEISS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

META BOARD ADDS UFC CEO TO STRENGTHEN TRUMP TIES

Ultimate Fighting Championship CEO Dana White, who campaigned for President-elect Donald Trump, is one of three new board members at Facebook-owner Meta Platforms. The social media company announced Monday that it had added White alongside former Microsoft executive Charlie Songhurst and John Elkann, who runs Exor NV, a major European investment company controlled by the Agnelli family. Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, created three new board seats for the appointments. The board now has 13 directors including CEO Mark Zuckerberg. "Charlie, Dana and John will add a depth of expertise and perspective that will help us tackle the massive opportunities ahead with AI, wearables and the future of human connection," Zuckerberg said in a statement.

DOCK WORKERS SAY THEY'VE REACHED TENTATIVE DEAL

The union representing 45,000 dock workers on the U.S. East and Gulf Coasts and their employers on Wednesday said they reached a tentative deal on a new six-year contract, averting a strike that could have snarled supply chains and taken a toll on the U.S. economy. It would have been the second strike in just four months by U.S. dock workers. The tentative agreement did not, however, include terms on the use of automation, which has been the thorniest issue of the labor talks. The United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) employer group and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), in a joint statement, called the agreement a "win-win." "This agreement protects current ILA jobs and establishes a framework for implementing technologies that will create more jobs while modernizing East and Gulf coast ports – making them safer and more efficient, and creating the capacity they need to keep our supply chains strong," the groups said. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

MORE THAN 2.5M TESLA VEHICLES INVESTIGATED

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is investigating nearly 2.6 million Tesla vehicles over reports that multiple crashes were caused by a feature that allows users to control their cars remotely. The NHTSA opened the probe on Monday after receiving four reports of crashes caused by either Tesla's Smart Summon or Actually Smart Summon features. According to the NHTSA, both features "allow a user to remotely move the vehicle to the user or to another designated location, through (the) use of a phone app." All four incidents received and reviewed by the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) involved the Tesla vehicles operating in Actually Smart Summon and failing to "detect posts or parked vehicles, resulting in a crash," the NHTSA said.

MARK BLINCH/REUTERS

Tax season means learning new tax forms

Tips on what W-2, 1099 and 5695 mean to you

Daniel de Visé and Elisabeth Buchwald USA TODAY

Tax Day is approaching, and soon it will be time to begin assembling forms. If you haven't looked at them yet, all those numbers and letters – W-2, W-9, 1099 – can easily overwhelm you.

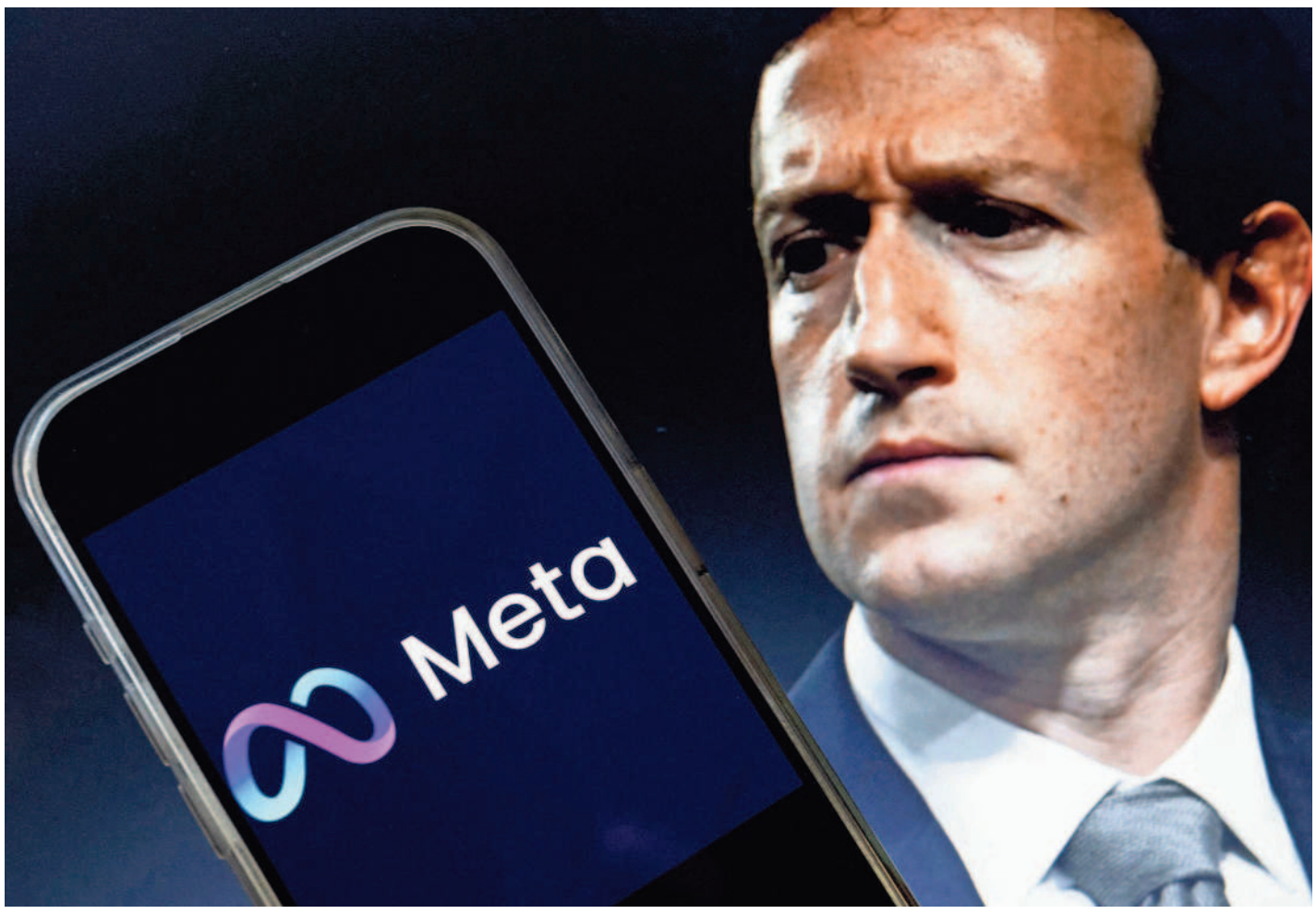
Some forms are pre-populated and designed for you to pass on to the IRS. They may be headed to your mailbox, or sitting in a "tax documents" portal on a website, awaiting download. In theory, there may be nothing you need to do, apart from delivering them to your tax preparer, if you have one, or documenting appropriate sums on your tax return. Other forms will require action on your part.

Here is a rundown. **See TAX FORMS, Page 6B**

What's a 1040 tax form?

The 1040 is the umbrella form you use to fill out your individual income tax return. In the two-page document, you'll record the various kinds of income you earned last year, state whether you'll be taking the standard deduction or itemizing, and report which tax credits you qualify to take.

After crunching the numbers according to the instructions on the form, you'll know how much you owe in taxes, or how big a refund you're due.



In response to a yearslong campaign from Donald Trump and conservatives who accused Meta of suppressing their political views, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg put an end to fact-checking. DREW ANGERER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Why Meta went MAGA

Will Zuckerberg's Trump bet pay off? Not all conservatives on Capitol Hill were so easily won over by Meta's pivot

Jessica Guynn
USA TODAY

Two weeks ahead of the inauguration, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg named President-elect Donald Trump ally and UFC boss Dana White to its board of directors.

Zuckerberg also pulled a page from Trump ally Elon Musk, turning over content moderation to users and loosening restrictions on hate speech on his company's social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and Threads.

Just days earlier, Meta elevated prominent Republican Joel Kaplan to lead its global affairs operation, after having served as a longtime executive at the tech giant. As part of the rollout, Kaplan touted the changes to Meta platforms on Fox News.

"It feels like we're in a new era now," Zuckerberg said, framing the shift as a return to the company's roots around free expression.

While it's common for large businesses to ingratiate themselves with an

See META, Page 6B

> **"It feels like we're in a new era now."**
>
> **Mark Zuckerberg**
> CEO of Meta, framing the shift as a return to the company's roots around free expression

Part-timers struggle to find full-time work

Some wonder if it's a sign of soft job market

Paul Davidson
USA TODAY

Since graduating from college a year ago, Kaitlyn Dwyer has sent out about 500 job applications but so far has come up empty in her search for a full-time position.

Dwyer, who lives in Roanoke, Virginia, has sought jobs as a library assistant, office manager and technical or advertising copywriter, among others. Although she has notched about 45 interviews, she's typically competing against 100 or so other applicants, many of whom have more experience in the industry.

"It doesn't matter what sort of (field) you're trying to get into," said Dwyer, who earned a creative writing degree from the University of Iowa but previously worked as an office manager for five years. "It's very, very difficult."

So instead, Dwyer, 27, is working part-time as a library assistant and living with her parents.

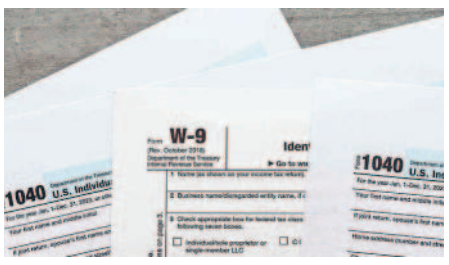
"It's very disheartening," she said. "A year is really a long time to not be able to get employment."

A growing number of Americans who want to work full time are settling for part-time roles – another sign that a labor market that was sizzling just a couple of years ago has cooled substantially.

"It's gotten much tougher for job

See JOBS, Page 6B

A worker at an Amazon warehouse in New Castle, Del. The number of part-time employees who prefer full-time jobs has been rising. TIM SHAFFER/REUTERS



Tax Day is approaching, and time to begin assembling forms. GETTY IMAGES

Tax forms

Continued from Page 5B

What is a W-9 used for?

A W-9 is typically used by businesses to collect a person's identifying information, including name, address and Social Security number or tax identification number, for income purposes.

A typical reason for filling out a W-9 is that you're an independent contractor, freelancer, or gig worker. You may also be asked to fill out a W-9 when you open an interest-bearing bank account or another financial account that delivers extra income.

This form doesn't go to the IRS. But the information you provide on a W-9 will be used to prepare and populate other forms: Read on.

Is a W-9 the same as a 1099?

The main difference between a W-9 and a 1099 is that you fill out a W-9, while the business or entity that is paying you fills out the 1099. In most cases, you should receive any 1099 form by the end of January.

A 1099 form is used to report income that isn't directly earned through an employer. Because there are many different ways to make money outside of a traditional job, there are several types of 1099 forms.

Common 1099s you might see: 1099-G, 1099-K, 1099-R, 1099-Div

Some of the most common 1099s you may receive:

- **1099-G**: Details unemployment compensation, as well as any state or local tax refund that's considered income.
- **1099-K:** Summarizes any income you earned if you made at least $5,000 on a third-party payment network like Etsy, eBay, or Venmo.
- **1099-R**: Reports distributions of $10 or more from various types of retirement plans, annuities, pensions, insurance contracts, and similar accounts.
- **1099-Div:** Used by banks and other financial institutions to report dividends and other distributions to taxpayers and the IRS.

What is a W-4, and what is it for?

A W-4 is a form you're required to fill out when you work directly for an employer. It tells your employer how much federal income tax should be withheld from your paycheck, based on factors like whether you're married and filing a joint return, whether you have dependents to claim, and whether you work multiple jobs.

Typically, you'll be asked to fill one out when you start a job. But it's a good idea to revisit the form regularly, especially if you notice that the amount withheld from your paycheck is much different than what you end up owing in taxes at year's end. You should also revisit it if your marital status changes, you have or adopt a child or your employment situation changes.

The IRS has a tax withholding estimator tool that can help you decide how to tweak your W-4 entries.

What does a W-2 form tell you?

A W-2 is the form your employer is required to send to you by the end of January, documenting how much money you earned working for them in the prior year, and how much tax was withheld from your paychecks. The form will also show how much money you earned from tips and any benefits you received during the year.

If you worked multiple jobs last year, you should expect to receive separate W-2s from each employer.

You'll need to include each W-2 form in your tax return.

Who fills out form 5695?

Form 5695 is used to declare any residential energy credits you may qualify for. If, for instance, you installed solar energy-producing roof tiles in 2024, you can claim the Residential Clean Energy Credit with the form.

Importantly, the form does not apply to businesses.

Meta

Continued from Page 5B

incoming administration, the approach is usually more subtle, said Dan Schnur, who teaches strategic political communications at the University of Southern California and the University of California, Berkeley.

"Trump might have never noticed a more traditional lobbying approach, but this was impossible for him to miss, which was the design from the very beginning," Schnur said.

At a press conference Tuesday at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, Trump praised Meta for its MAGA makeover, saying "I think they've come a long way." Asked if Meta was responding to threats he had made against the company and Zuckerberg, the president-elect said: "Probably."

Zuckerberg and Trump: A complicated relationship

The relationship between Zuckerberg and Trump is complicated.

In 2019, Zuckerberg met with the president in the Oval Office. The following year, Trump had dinner with the billionaire social media CEO and said Zuckerberg congratulated him for being "No. 1 on Facebook."

But tensions flared after Trump supporters invaded the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and Zuckerberg suspended Trump from his company's social media platforms.

Trump has called Facebook an "enemy of the people" and Zuckerberg a "criminal." He accused "Zuckerbucks" of plotting against him during the 2020 election. Trump even threatened Zuckerberg with lifetime imprisonment if he tried to rig the 2024 election against him.

Sensing the shifting political winds, Zuckerberg has been working for months to reset the relationship. He called the president-elect a "badass" after the assassination attempt in July.

Following Trump's decisive victory, Zuckerberg congratulated the president-elect on Threads: "Looking forward to working with you and your administration."

After two days of meetings between their advisers, Zuckerberg dined with Trump on the patio of his private Mar-a-Lago club in November and gave him a pair of his company's Ray-Ban smart glasses. Meta then broke with company tradition and donated $1 million to Trump's inaugural fund.

Zuckerberg's campaign for Trump's good graces

With Republicans back in control of both chambers of Congress and calling for new regulation of Big Tech, Zuckerberg stepped up his charm offensive.

CEO of Ultimate Fighting Championship Dana White, President-elect Donald Trump, singer Kid Rock and Tesla CEO Elon Musk pose for a photo as they attend UFC 309 at Madison Square Garden in New York. KENA BETANCUR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Last week, Zuckerberg shuffled his senior leadership ranks to replace Nick Clegg, a centrist former British deputy prime minister, with Kaplan as the company's global policy chief.

This week, Zuckerberg referred to Trump's election victory as "a cultural tipping point."

In response to a yearslong campaign from Trump and conservatives who accused Meta of suppressing their political views, he put an end to fact-checking and vowed to move trust and safety workers from California to Texas "where there's less concern about the bias of our teams."

"We saw a lot of societal and political pressure, all in the direction of more content moderation, more censorship. And we've got a real opportunity now," Kaplan said. "We've got a new administration and a new president coming in who are big defenders of free expression, and that makes a difference."

Some in Trump's entourage welcomed the political realignment.

"Thank you Zuck and Meta for recognizing that the censorship had gone too far, and seizing the opportunity to make a course correction. I do believe you are getting back to your roots," David Sacks, Trump's crypto and AI czar, said on X.

Behind the realignment: Regulation, immigration and AI

House Judiciary Chair Jim Jordan told reporters that he plans to meet with Zuckerberg in the next few weeks. That was likely welcome news.

Like other business leaders, getting back into Trump's good graces and that of the GOP establishment could make a significant difference over the next four years.

On the one hand, Meta and other companies would like Trump's ear on key policy issues for the tech sector such as immigration, trade and tariffs and energy.

Trump has already shown a willingness to break with his grassroots supporters and side with Musk and tech companies over visas for skilled workers. Perhaps even more important is the promise of less regulation.

"He seems to have a lot of energy around reducing regulation," Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said of Trump at The New York Times' DealBook Summit. "If I can help do that, I'm going to help him."

Zuckerberg reaction mixed on Capitol Hill

Avoiding regulatory battles is a top priority for Zuckerberg. Andrew Ferguson, Trump's pick to lead the Federal Trade Commission, had vowed to target companies "that facilitate or promote censorship." Meta is already facing an antitrust case from the FTC seeking to break it up.

Not all conservatives on Capitol Hill were so easily won over by Meta's pivot.

In reality, the changes Zuckerberg made were not as sweeping as they appeared. Meta had already watered down policies to limit the spread of falsehoods. In the run-up to the election, Meta allowed claims the 2020 election was rigged in political ads.

"Now that President Trump is about to take office, Meta has allegedly decided to stop censoring conservatives," Sen. Marsha Blackburn, Republican of Tennessee, wrote on X. "This is a ploy to avoid being regulated. We will not be fooled."

Jobs

Continued from Page 5B

seekers," said economist Dante DeAntonio of Moody's Analytics.

How is the job market right now?

On the surface, the job market looks surprisingly sturdy despite still-elevated inflation and interest rates. The unemployment rate was a historically low 4.2% in November and employers added a healthy average of 175,000 jobs a month from September through November and 180,000 in the first 11 months of 2024.

Friday, the Labor Department is expected to report a solid 160,000 jobs were added in December and the jobless rate held steady at 4.2%, according to economists surveyed by Bloomberg.

But beneath the shiny figures are hints of distress. In November, there were about 4.5 million part-time workers who preferred full-time jobs, up from 4 million a year earlier, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The ranks of Americans toiling part time because their hours were cut back and those who could only find part-time jobs both rose by double-digit percentages.

Historically, the tally of so-called involuntary part-time workers is still fairly low and the increase at least partly reflects the labor market's return to normal after the post-pandemic hiring frenzy known as the "great resignation," said Brad Hershbein, senior economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Also, the number of involuntary part-timers fell by 373,000 in the most recent three-month period.

What is the involuntary part-time rate?

Yet monthly changes can be volatile. November's 4.5 million grudging part-timers were more than 200,000 above the pre-COVID-19 average in late 2019. From September through November, an average of 2.8% of all employed Americans worked part time because they couldn't find full-time jobs, up from 2.7% during the same three months in 2019 – a measure that better accounts for labor force growth.

Dwyer earns $16 an hour and works 12 to 15 hours a week – enough to cover gas, groceries and an occasional dinner out with friends. She added she's fortunate she lives with her parents and doesn't face housing and utility costs.

"I would like a full-time job so that, rather than living paycheck to paycheck, I can make enough to have money to put away for emergencies" and rent an apartment, she said.

Dwyer added that she has health issues, and if she got a second part-time job, she would lose her Medicaid payments because her income would exceed the poverty threshold.

What are the signs of a weakening job market?

That's not the only signal the job market is softening. The number of monthly hires has hovered near the lowest mark since 2016. And in November, more than 23% of jobless workers were unemployed six months or longer, the most since March 2022.

The average number of applicants for a job opening on LinkedIn jumped to 2.5 this past fall from about 1.5 in 2022, the social media site said.

What's going on?

Why is it so hard to get a job right now?

Businesses are still grappling with hefty labor expenses after they hiked wages in response to post-pandemic worker shortages as well as high borrowing costs due to the Federal Reserve's sharp interest rate hikes to fight inflation, DeAntonio said. Meanwhile, he said, sales are flat or rising modestly after a post-COVID-19 burst, squeezing company profits.

Also, employers scrambled to bring on so many workers during the labor crunch of 2021 to 2023 that they have less need to hire lots of employees now, Hershbein said.

The recent wave of return-to-office mandates is another factor that could be nudging workers to part-time gigs. Many Americans who can't find jobs that allow them to work remotely are likely taking part-time positions until they do, Hershbein said.

Are companies still laying people off?

At the same time, consumer spending is still growing, mostly because of higher-income households that are benefitting from big gains in stock and housing values. As a result, companies aren't laying off many employees, and that's keeping net monthly job gains growing at a solid pace, DeAntonio and Hershbein said.

The bottom line is a labor market stuck in neutral, with few layoffs but not much hiring. "If you do get laid off, it's a challenging hiring environment," DeAntonio said.

Will the job market get better in 2025?

How the labor market evolves in coming months may depend largely on the policies of President-elect Donald Trump, the economists said. Trump's planned tax cuts and deregulation could spark a fresh hiring surge. But his import tariffs and the deportations of millions of immigrants without permanent legal status could reignite inflation and hamper economic and job growth.

For now, uncertainty is another factor suppressing full-time hiring.

Companies won't add lots of full-time workers if they "don't know what's coming down the pike," Hershbein said. "It can go in a lot of different ways."

Tips for insurance claims after fires

Approach it as business transaction, experts say

Bailey Schulz
USA TODAY

A firefighter works as powerful winds fueling devastating wildfires in the Los Angeles area force people to evacuate, at the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif., on Wednesday. DAVID SWANSON/REUTERS

Multiple wildfires have been sweeping across Los Angeles County since Tuesday, killing at least five and pushing thousands out of their homes.

The total damage is not yet known; the fires were 0% contained as of Wednesday. For the owners of the 1,000-plus structures destroyed by the fires, consumer advocates say there are ways to help get their insurance claims treated fairly and paid in full.

"Understand the reality of a large-dollar insurance claim, that it really does require you to advocate for yourself," said Amy Bach, executive director of United Policyholders, a consumer advocacy group. "The bottom line is that people need to think of an insurance claim as a business transaction and approach it with that kind of mindset."

Insurance tips for affected homeowners

The first step for affected homeowners is to focus on personal safety, as well as the safety of family and any pets, according to Michael DeLong, a research and advocacy associate at the Consumer Federation of America, a consumer advocacy group.

After that, homeowners should contact their insurer as soon as possible. When it's safe to return home, take photos and videos and start a journal to document the damage. Policyholders should also document every interaction with their insurance company and track their expenses. DeLong suggests keeping receipts for temporary housing, food costs and any initial repairs.

If a homeowner does decide to take on immediate repairs, they should vet any adjustors or contractors before hiring and make sure they are licensed.

"Unfortunately, post-disaster scams are pretty common," DeLong said.

If a homeowner believes their insurance company is mishandling their claim, DeLong said they should contact the California Department of Insurance. The agency's website has a form where homeowners can file complaints.

Looking forward, DeLong suggests homeowners take measures to mitigate future wildfire risks. Steps like installing a roof with noncombustible coverings or clearing away flammable vegetation near a home can limit the damage.

"That may cost money in the short run, but it will save you money in the long run. In fact, it could actually save your home and even your life," DeLong said. "The problem is that doing all these measures takes time and money and effort. And for people living paycheck to paycheck, that's really hard to do."

How many homes are covered by insurance?

Homeowners insurance policies tend to cover damage caused by wildfires, according to the Insurance Information Institute. Bach said a typical insurance policy covers temporary housing, repairs and rebuilding, damage from smoke, personal property repairs and replacement, and any damage to surrounding landscaping. Damaged vehicles should be covered by car insurance.

> **"It's so common that people who lose their home in a wildfire find out that they didn't have enough coverage."**
>
> **Amy Bach**
> Executive director of United Policyholders, a consumer advocacy group

Mortgage lenders typically require homeowners insurance, and most American homeowners are insured. But as insurance rates skyrocket and more insurance companies pull out of states like California, a growing number of homeowners who own their home outright are dropping their coverage.

Others who struggle to find insurance in the private market have had to buy basic insurance coverage through the state's insurer of last resort, the California FAIR Plan, which has higher premiums and limited coverage. There were more than 450,000 FAIR Plan policies in the state in late 2024, more than double the count from 2020.

"California's home insurance market was already struggling, it was already getting much harder for people to keep and afford insurance on their homes. And this is going to make that situation worse," Bach said.

Bach warned that other homeowners affected by the fires may find themselves underinsured, or paying for a policy that doesn't cover the full cost to rebuild or repair. "It's so common that people who lose their home in a wildfire find out that they didn't have enough coverage," Bach said. "Any time there's a fire, it's a good reminder to look at how much per square foot you would have to pay a contractor to rebuild your house if it were to burn to the ground."

These 25 drugs cost taxpayers, Medicare the most

Popular diabetes treatments make list

Ken Alltucker
USA TODAY

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Chairman of Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, speaks during a hearing of Novo Nordisk CEO Lars Jorgensen on U.S. prices for the weight loss drugs Ozempic and Wegovy, on Capitol Hill in Washington. PIROSCHKA VAN DE WOUW/REUTERS

Popular diabetes drugs such as Ozempic and Trulicity are among 25 drugs Medicare has spent the most on but hasn't yet selected for price negotiation, according to a report released Thursday.

The report from AARP Public Policy Institute said average list prices on these 25 drugs have nearly doubled since they hit the market and collectively cost Medicare – and American taxpayers – nearly $50 billion in 2022.

About 7 million older adults on Medicare used the drugs and had to pay a portion of the bill at the pharmacy or via mail order.

One in 5 older adults don't fill prescriptions or skip doses to save money, the report said.

About 53 million Americans were enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug plan in 2024. Enrollees who take the priciest drugs will get some relief this year with a $2,000 cap on drug costs.

But AARP officials said the report underscores the importance of empowering Medicare to negotiate prices on behalf of enrollees and taxpayers.

"We really are seeing these remarkable price increases year after year," said Leigh Purvis, prescription drug policy principal at AARP's public policy institute. "It's so important to try to discourage drug companies from taking these regular price increases."

Medicare bargains with drugmakers

Under legislation passed in 2022 called the Inflation Reduction Act, Medicare was allowed for the first time to negotiate prices with drug companies on a limited number of medications.

For the first round of bargaining, Medicare negotiated discounts of 38% to 79% when the prices take effect in 2026. The drugs are Eliquis, Jardiance, Xarelto, Januvia, Farxiga, Entresto, Enbrel, Imbruvica, Stelara, and the insulins Fiasp and NovoLog.

Medicare will announce the next 15 drugs by Feb. 1 and negotiate prices that will take effect Jan. 1, 2027. Another 15 drugs will be selected in 2026 for negotiated prices that will be rolled out in 2028.

Purvis said it's a "safe bet" that some of the 25 drugs listed in AARP's report will be in the next round of Medicare negotiations. Retail drugs that have no generic equivalent and have been on the market for at least seven years can be eligible for negotiation. Biologic drugs, which are derived from living cells, aren't subject to negotiation until they've been on the market at least 11 years.

AARP said five drugs that accounted for the largest share of Medicare spending included the diabetes drugs Trulicity and Ozempic, the asthma drug Trelegy Ellipta, the HIV medication Biktarvy and the cancer drug Xtandi.

The list price on Merck's diabetes drug Janumet increased 293% since it hit the market in 2007, the largest increase among all 25 drugs, according to the report. By contrast, the list price of hepatitis C drug Epclusa hasn't increased since it was approved in 2016.

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a trade group representing drug manufacturers, said any study that relies on list prices is misleading because it doesn't describe what people pay after rebates and insurance discounts are applied. When such discounts and rebates are factored in, the net prices of drugs have fallen for the past six years, the trade group said.

Drug companies face inflation penalty

List prices on 20 of the drugs increased faster than the rate of inflation. Under the 2022 federal law, drugmakers must pay rebates to Medicare if list prices increase faster than inflation.

Medicare price negotiations and rebates for drugs whose prices rise faster than inflation are both important tools to help taxpayers and consumers save on drug spending, said Juliette Cubanski, deputy director of the program on Medicare policy at KFF, a health policy nonprofit.

"It doesn't do anything to prevent manufacturers from bringing drugs to market with high prices to begin with," Cubanski said. "But it is designed to deal with price increases from one year to the next that have been rising faster than inflation."

Will Medicare target Ozempic for discounts?

The Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk has been scrutinized over the pricing of its blockbuster diabetes drug Ozempic and weight loss drug Wegovy. The company's top executive was called before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions last September to answer questions about the drug's list price.

Novo Nordisk expects Ozempic, which has been on the market since 2017, will be on Medicare's list of drugs to negotiate prices concessions, Bloomberg reported. The company told USA TODAY that it would not discuss Medicare's next round of negotiations because the list of selected drugs is not yet public.

Novo Nordisk spokesperson Jamie Bennett said several factors influence drug pricing, including inflation, market conditions, government and private insurer actions as well as drug pricing middlemen called pharmacy benefit managers.

Pharmacy managers often demand rebates from drug companies in exchange for placement on health insurance formularies – the list of drugs an insurer will cover.

Bennett said 80% of patients with insurance pay $25 or less per month for Ozempic and 90% pay $50 or less.

"While the list price is set by Novo Nordisk, taken out of context it can be misleading," Bennett said. "The list price does not reflect the rebates, discounts, and fees that Novo Nordisk provides to lower the list price, nor does it reflect the numerous other costs in the system that ultimately impact the price PBMs, health insurers or governments pay."

50★States

News from across the USA

ALABAMA Wetumpka: Law enforcement officers and prosecutors are investigating a case in which a man who was in the country illegally and had been deported five times allegedly attempted to kidnap an Elmore County teen.

ALASKA Juneau: The state of Alaska has sued the Biden administration for what it calls violations of a congressional directive to allow oil and gas development in a portion of the federal Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

ARIZONA Tucson: Three Arizona towns – Tucson, Sedona and Flagstaff – were recently named the best mountain towns in the U.S., according to a new study from WeGoDating.com.

ARKANSAS Fort Smith: The Fort Smith Public Schools is using AI to help keep students, teachers and staff safe at all 26 campuses. Working with ZeroEyes software and Curtis Stout, the school district implemented and installed the new security system for nearly 16,000 students, staff and teachers.

CALIFORNIA Bakersfield: California and transportation officials met Monday near Bakersfield to announce that the high-speed rail project has officially entered a new phase that brings the start of passenger service one step closer to reality. State and transportation officials at the event also spoke of a partnership between the California High-Speed Rail Authority, Brightline West, and the High Desert Corridor to connect the Golden State and Nevada.

COLORADO Denver: More than $17 million in funding will bring more electric vehicle fast-charging ports to 29 more locations in Colorado. The funding will go toward an additional 168 ports across the state, according to a joint news release from Colorado's Energy Office and Department of Transportation.

CONNECTICUT New Haven: Police said patrols will be increasing after dozens of cars were broken into and vandalized, WFSB reported.

DELAWARE Wilmington: Educators in Brandywine schools have lodged a formal complaint against their own school board president for unfair labor practices.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: The Washington Post said it would lay off about 4% of its workforce or less than 100 employees in a bid to cut costs, as the newspaper grapples with growing losses. The newspaper is making changes across several business functions, a spokesperson said, while suggesting the job cuts will not impact its newsroom.

FLORIDA Tallahassee: A free speech activist suing over Florida schools' refusal to display a Satan banner will get his day in court, a federal judge has ruled. In a recent decision, U.S. District Judge Robert Scola of Miami rejected the School Board of Broward County's request for the case to be thrown out, giving a thumbs up to a March 10 trial.

GEORGIA Columbia County: A 76-year-old Columbia County woman was tricked into sending almost $3,000 in Apple gift cards to a con artist claiming to be Grammy award-winning country music star Alan Jackson.

HAWAII Haleiwa: Officials said a 19-year-old woman died after she fell from a hiking trail during a New Year's Eve party, Hawaii News Now reported.

IDAHO Boise: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced that Idaho will receive nearly $1 million to support the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which helps families achieve financial success, KTVB reported.

ILLINOIS Chicago: The president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Illinois is resigning after seven years leading the organization.

INDIANA Indianapolis: Indianapolis Public Schools board commissioners and many IPS community members condemned a recently proposed bill that would dissolve the district and turn all its schools into charter schools. The bill authored by Rep. Jake Teshka proposes dissolving any school district in which more than 50% of the students attend a non-district school. Under the bill, all the district's schools would transition to charter schools. The bill would also remove an affected district's elected school board, putting an appointed board in its place.

HIGHLIGHT: TENNESSEE

Memphis City Councilwoman Pearl Eva Walker cuts the first piece of an Elvis Presley-themed birthday cake. CHRIS DAY/USA TODAY NETWORK

Memphis: A large, enthusiastic throng of music fans from around the world gathered on Graceland's front lawn Wednesday morning to mark what would have been Elvis Presley's 90th birthday. The event came as part of the annual Elvis birthday celebrations at Graceland, which kicked off Monday. The ceremony came under sunny skies but with temperatures that hovered around the 20s. The conditions did not deter the faithful – close to 3,000 people, according to Graceland officials – from assembling for the reading of official city and county proclamation honoring Presley, as well as a ceremonial cake cutting.

IOWA Des Moines: Iowa experienced a record number of tornadoes in 2024, with a total of 125 touching down in the year. In April and May alone, 98 tornadoes were recorded.

KANSAS Topeka: The owner of Japanese steakhouses in Kansas violated multiple federal labor laws, ruled a judge in the U.S. District Court of Kansas.

KENTUCKY Glendale: After announcing a public campaign to unionize in November, workers at the BlueOval SK Battery Park in Hardin County officially filed for a union election to join the United Auto Workers. Workers at the battery plant have taken the next steps to join the UAW – the same union representing auto workers from Ford, General Motors and Stellantis – noting safety concerns, worker health issues, and lack of open communication from the company.

LOUISIANA Bogalusa: The mayor of a Louisiana city has been arrested for allegedly assisting in the distribution of illegal drugs, including opioids, high-grade marijuana, THC products and MDMA, police said. Tyrin Truong, the 25-year-old mayor of Bogalusa, has been charged with conducting transactions involving proceeds from drug offenses, using someone else's personal property (considered a "movable" under Louisiana law) without their consent and soliciting prostitutes, Louisiana State Police said.

MAINE Augusta: The Maine Department of Labor announced that the new Paid Family and Medical Leave Portal has launched. The online system allows employers to register, designate a payroll processor, file quarterly wage reports, and remit quarterly premium contributions.

MARYLAND Hagerstown: AT&T held an event last week to highlight a new cell tower north of Hagerstown that features dedicated "VIP" service for first responders, AT&T spokesman Dan Langan said. The tower is part of FirstNet, Built with AT&T, which features a Band 14 spectrum set aside by the federal government for first responder use, Langan said.

MASSACHUSETTS Boston: U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts Joshua S. Levy announced that he will be stepping down on Jan. 17, a few days before President-elect Donald Trump is inaugurated.

MICHIGAN Sault Ste. Marie: City officials have adopted a new safety program that is expected to impact ongoing and future city projects. The city has been without a safety policy for several years now, so with the help of a consultant, a new safety program was recently developed.

MINNESOTA St. Paul: Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz announced that the Office of Cannabis Management Interim Director Charlene Briner is stepping down from her role. The move comes after Briner helped build OCM from its inception in 2023, and while Briner's interim position is coming to a close, the state has yet to find a permanent suiter for the role, according to Walz's announcement. Instead, OCM General Counsel Eric Taubel will take charge as interim director.

MISSISSIPPI Jackson: Todd Gee, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, announced his intention to resign from his position in the federal court system. Gee is expected to resign effective Jan. 17.

MISSOURI Jefferson City: After years of figuring out different ways to find enough qualified teachers – and keep them on the job – Missouri has put together a game plan of lessons learned. The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Playbook was released Tuesday. It was developed by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Community Training and Assistance Centers.

MONTANA Butte: Authorities said a man robbed a Wells Fargo bank and then waited inside to be arrested by police, KPAX reported.

NEBRASKA Lincoln: Officials said a man died after he lost control of his vehicle while speeding and crashed into an apartment building, WOWT reported.

NEVADA Humboldt County: Lithium Americas boosted the reserve estimate for Nevada's Thacker Pass lithium project after geological testing showed the site likely holds one of the world's largest supplies of the electric vehicle battery metal.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Durham: Paul Dean, chief of the University of New Hampshire Police Department, is retiring from the state's flagship university to join the incoming administration of Gov.-elect Kelly Ayotte. Dean will become Ayotte's director of citizen services, a statewide role announced by her transition team Monday.

NEW JERSEY Mount Olive: The long and bitter conflict between the Mount Olive Board of Education and former superintendent Robert Zywicki – who filed a whistleblower lawsuit after his 2023 resignation – has come to an expensive conclusion for taxpayers. A joint news release issued by the parties announced a "mutually acceptable resolution of their differences," which date back to conflicts that resulted in Zywicki's suspension from the Morris County district more than two years ago.

NEW MEXICO Santa Fe: State health officials reported that New Mexico saw a decline in overdose deaths in 2023, KRQE reported.

NEW YORK Albany: Flu, COVID and norovirus infections are spiking as New Yorkers return to work and schools following the holidays, prompting public health officials to renew efforts to improve vaccination rates.

NORTH CAROLINA Calabash: One major road project in Calabash is on track to be finished next year. Construction to replace the Calabash Bridge over the Calabash River, originally built in 1975, has been going on since early September 2023. The project, which a price tag over $7 million, could be finished by the summer.

NORTH DAKOTA Bismarck: The Aeronautics Commission said that a record-breaking 5.5 million acres of cropland were treated by air in 2024, KFYR reported.

OHIO Cincinnati: A nearly 1,500-mile loop of hiking trails in Ohio could soon join the ranks of the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail. The National Park Service is evaluating whether to add the Buckeye Trail, which runs from Lake Erie to the Ohio River, to its National Trails System. Over the next several weeks, the service will share information about its feasibility study and hear from the public at cities around the state. One of those meetings will be held in Cincinnati on Jan. 16.

OKLAHOMA Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma County jail has failed another surprise health inspection, found "not in substantial compliance" with state regulations, this time after an actual examination – not "failing" because jail administration wouldn't let inspectors on the premises.

OREGON Salem: The audits division of the Oregon Secretary of State has referred potential ethics violations by the governor's office to the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, according to a letter former deputy secretary of state Cheryl Myers sent on Jan. 3 to Gov. Tina Kotek.

PENNSYLVANIA Harrisburg: Disease management areas for chronic wasting disease are expected to expand this year with infections being found in new parts of southeastern and western Pennsylvania.

RHODE ISLAND Providence: "Ella McCay," the James L. Brooks movie starring Jamie Lee Curtis, Woody Harrelson and Emma Mackey that filmed in and around Providence last year, will be returning to shoot some added scenes in March.

SOUTH CAROLINA Greenville: The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has placed an immigration detainer on the man accused of making a bomb threat and closing parts of Interstate 85 in Greenville.

SOUTH DAKOTA Sioux Falls: After an upsetting cancellation last year, representatives with the Sioux Falls Sports Authority have scheduled its 16th annual Sioux Falls Marathon a little later this time around, hoping to avoid the extreme heat and high humidity that ultimately shut down the race last August. The 2025 marathon has been scheduled for the morning of Sept. 21.

TEXAS Austin: It's hard to deny that 2024 was quite the year, for better or for worse. And once again, the Lone Star State went above and beyond. A total of 23 world records were broken in Texas last year. Of the Lone Star State's 2024 records, five took place in Fort Worth, four in Dallas and three in Austin. Houston native Beyoncé broke five all on her own.

UTAH Tooele: Officials said an investigation is underway after a man was shot several times after an altercation, KUTV reported.

VERMONT North Springfield: Vermont Packinghouse in North Springfield has permanently banned a delivery driver from its facility and put new, more stringent safeguards in place after a June incident in which pigs suspected to be suffering from heatstroke were kicked off the back of a truck by the driver, violating animal welfare laws.

VIRGINIA Harrisonburg: Richard Moore, a former executive vice president with Nexus Services Inc., pleaded guilty to defrauding the IRS out of nearly $3.2 million, nixing a scheduled two-week jury trial.

WASHINGTON Everett: Snohomish County officials said an "aggressive" owl has been attacking visitors at McCollum Park in Everett, KING5 reported.

WEST VIRGINIA Pickens: Randolph County Schools announced that it has decided to withdraw its proposal to close Pickens School, WDTV reported.

WISCONSIN Milwaukee: Milwaukee's violent crime declined slightly in 2024, with drops in homicides, burglaries and thefts driving the downturn. In all, violent and property crimes dipped 4% each in the city compared to a year earlier. That decline followed last year's improvements – however auto-related crimes continued to shirk this small trend.

WYOMING Albany County: Opponents of the Rail Tie wind farm have filed a lawsuit against federal regulators in an effort to halt the controversial 149-turbine renewable energy project, WyoFile reported.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

NFL wild-card playoff watchability rankings, 3C

Cotton Bowl keys as Ohio State and Texas clash in Friday's college Playoff semifinal game, **6C**

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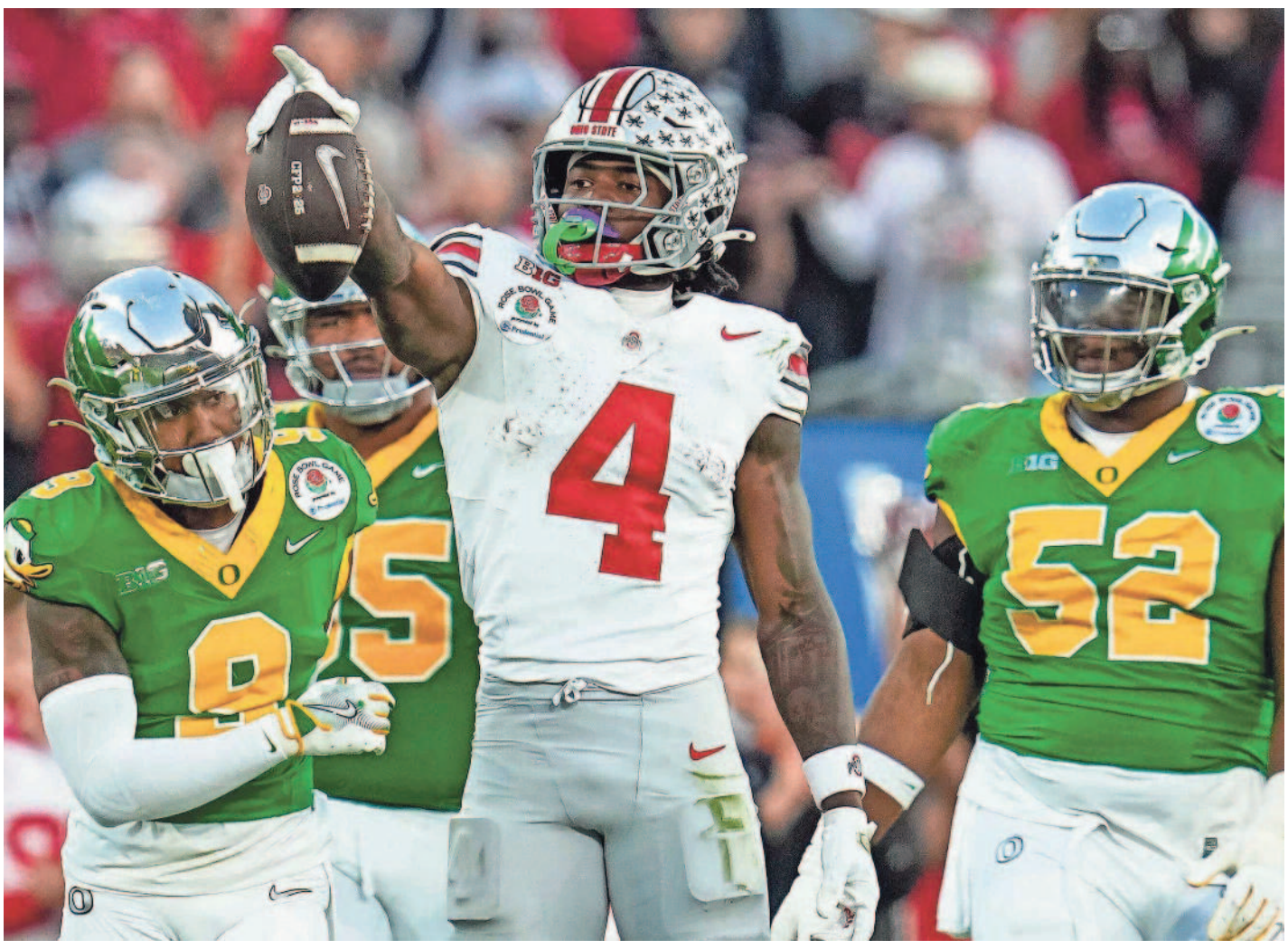

Ohio State and wide receiver Jeremiah Smith play Texas on Friday in the College Football Playoff semifinals in the Cotton Bowl. ADAM CAIRNS/THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH, USA TODAY NETWORK

Buckeyes frosh Smith should challenge NFL

Dan Wolken
Columnist
USA TODAY

DALLAS – The best player remaining in the College Football Playoff is a 6-foot-3 man-child made of steel biceps and spring-loaded legs who can't really be guarded by his fellow student-athletes.

And my hope for 19-year-old freshman Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith is that the next two weeks are the last he'll ever see of college football.

It has been more than two decades since another Buckeyes star, Maurice Clarett, tried – and ultimately failed – to legally challenge the NFL's eligibility rules that require football players to wait three years after high school before entering the draft.

It's time for someone to try again. And nobody has come along with a better case than Smith.

"I mean, the guy's NFL-ready," Oregon coach Dan Lanning said on New Year's Day after Smith torched his team for 187 yards on seven receptions in the Rose Bowl. "He's that talented."

In a sport where evaluating players can be brutally tough, assessing Smith is comically easy. No nuance is required to see how intelligently he runs routes, how proficiently he catches the ball and how naturally he separates from defenders. Few, if any, receivers have ever come into college football as advanced as Smith.

NFL scouts and analysts generally agree that if he were eligible for this year's NFL draft, he would be in play – if not the outright favorite – to be picked at No. 1. Friday's College Football Playoff semifinal against Texas here at the Cotton Bowl is likely to be another *tour de force* by the nation's most gifted freshman, showcasing why he already has all the skills necessary to be a bona-fide star in the NFL.

But as things stand, Smith won't be in the draft until 2027.

That's great for college football. It's like winning the lottery for Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day. And it's not even that bad for Smith, who is going to bank millions of dollars in name, image and likeness (NIL) deals before he ever plays a down in the NFL.

That last part is the major separator between Smith and Clarett, who said last year at a University of New Hampshire symposium that the issues leading to his dismissal from Ohio State in 2003 began with a desperate need for $2,000 to fix the transmission on his car.

Those hard-won, long-overdue economic rights for college athletes mean that the most likely and easiest path for Smith is to play the next two years at Ohio State, win a Heisman Trophy and become a rich young man before he even walks across the stage to shake Roger Goodell's hand.

That's the power of status quo: It benefits college football because stars have to stay three years; it benefits the NFL because they have a free minor league system; and it benefits current NFL players because they have a smaller pool of new players trying to take their jobs. With NIL money flowing, it isn't even so bad these days for someone like Smith. There are a lot worse fates than having to spend two more years as the most popular and recognizable athlete on one of the best college campuses in America.

But every now and then, it's good to challenge the status quo.

"Look, cases that we thought were settled precedent like Roe v. Wade – sorry to get on platform – but suddenly it is overruled. OK?" Shira Scheindlin, the former Southern District of New York judge who initially ruled in Clarett's favor before it was overturned by the circuit court, said at the UNH symposium looking back on the 20-year anniversary of the case. "That didn't make me happy, but they do it. So things change."

Even at the time, there was wide disagreement about whether the NFL's draft eligibility rules violated antitrust laws.

Without getting too deep into the legal weeds, the NFL essentially argued that the rule was not subject to antitrust scrutiny under a non-statutory labor exemption.

Alan Milstein, the lead attorney for Clarett, argued there was no evidence that the rule was collectively bargained and that it actually predated the first collective bargaining agreement with the NFL Players Association. It was simply part of the way the league had done business and that it was an illegal barrier to entering the NFL's labor market. (The NFL did not agree with that characterization, for the record.)

In the end, Scheindlin ruled in Clarett's favor, writing that the three-year rule "must be sacked."

The NFL took the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, where current Supreme Court Judge Sonia Sotomayor authored the opinion that reversed Scheindlin's ruling and kept the NFL rule in place. Clarett appealed to the Supreme Court, which declined to take the case in 2005, and there have been no serious challenges since. A spokesman for the NFLPA declined to comment to USA TODAY Sports on whether it would support a player challenging the rule once again.

"I think there are grounds for reasonable people to differ on these issues, without a doubt," Scheindlin said during the symposium.

But the thin lines on which Clarett's case was decided 20 years ago under-

See WOLKEN, Page 2C

NFL eyes LA fires ahead of wild card

Nate Davis
USA TODAY

As immensely destructive wildfires continue raging through the greater Los Angeles area, the NFL has already put together an alternate plan in the event Monday evening's game between the NFC West champion Rams and Minnesota Vikings at SoFi Stadium, which is in neighboring Inglewood, cannot be safely played.

"The NFL's priority is the safety of the Los Angeles community. We are grateful for the tireless efforts of the first responders. Our hearts are with Los Angeles and everyone affected by the fires," read a statement distributed by the league Wednesday evening.

"We continue to prepare to play the Vikings-Rams game as scheduled Monday night at SoFi Stadium. As with all games, there are contingency plans in the event a change in location is needed. In this instance, the game would be played on Monday night at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, AZ, if necessary.

"We will continue to closely monitor developments in the area and will remain in contact with public officials, both clubs and the NFLPA."

The Rams issued a statement Thursday: "That is currently only a contingency plan and if that happens we will inform all ticket holders via email what that means for their current tickets," the Rams emphasized in their statement. "We hope you all are somewhere safe and we hope to see you Monday night."

Rams players have offered support on social media, Cooper Kupp posting Wednesday on X: "Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone affected by the fires. Thank you to the firefighters, first responders, and everyone else doing their best in unfathomable circumstances."

If a change is necessary, it wouldn't be the first time the NFL moved a Monday night game from Southern California due to wildfires. A contest between the San Diego Chargers and Miami Dolphins in 2003 had to be shifted to Tempe, Arizona, then home of the Cardinals. The displaced Chargers lost 26-10.

The Bolts, who left San Diego in 2017 to relocate to LA, could again experience a disruption ahead of their wild-card game Saturday afternoon in Houston against the AFC South champion Texans.

The Chargers altered their practice schedule Wednesday due to air quality issues.

Hornets-Lakers game postponed

The NBA announced that Thursday's game between the Los Angeles Lakers and Charlotte Hornets, scheduled to take place at the Crypto.com Center in Los Angeles, has been postponed due to the ongoing wildfires in the area. The date for the rescheduled game will be announced at a later time.

"The entire NBA family sends its thoughts and support to the community of Los Angeles during this challenging time," the NBA statement read. "Our prayers remain with those affected by the unimaginable devastation caused by the wildfires."

Contributing: Mark Giannotto

Hoping to see Cavs-Thunder again – in NBA Finals

Jeff Zillgitt
Columnist
USA TODAY

If Wednesday's Cleveland-Oklahoma City game was a potential NBA Finals preview, sign me up for that right now.

I'll take a best-of-seven Finals featuring the kind of basketball that was played in the Cleveland Cavaliers' 129-122 victory against the Oklahoma Thunder.

Spare me narratives about market size. Just give me great, competitive basketball. Give me two teams with great players who play great offense and defense.

Give me Cleveland-Oklahoma City.

Right now, they're the two best teams in the NBA – Cleveland at 32-4 and Oklahoma City at 30-6. It doesn't mean it stays that way. Getting to the Finals is difficult, so there's no guarantee for any team. Oklahoma City has to get through the gauntlet that is the Western Conference, and the Cavaliers likely have to beat defending champion Boston.

But there's enough evidence through this portion of the season that indicates both the Thunder, whose 15-game winning streak ended with the road loss, and Cavs, who extended their winning streak to 11 games, can do that.

They pass the eye and data test. They both have stars (OKC's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell, Jarrett Allen and Darius Garland) and stars in the making (Thunder's Jalen Williams and Cavaliers' Evan Mobley). They both have two excellent coaches (Cleveland's Kenny Atkinson and Oklahoma City's Mark Daigneault) and have been assembled by smart front office staffs (led by OKC's Sam Presti and Cleveland's Koby Altman).

And they pass the entertainment

See ZILLGITT, Page 2C

US withholds WADA funding amid tensions

Tom Schad
USA TODAY

The U.S. government has withheld its annual financial contribution to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), ratcheting up tensions between U.S. stakeholders and WADA over the anti-doping organization's effectiveness and transparency.

WADA and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) confirmed Wednesday that the U.S. had declined to pay the $3.6 million it had pledged to WADA as part of its normal funding process for 2024. The New York Times reported that the decision to withhold funding was made by the White House in consultation with Congress, over concerns with WADA's handling of a 2021 case in which 23 Chinese swimmers were quietly cleared after testing positive for the same banned substance.

"WADA must take concrete actions to restore trust in the world antidoping system and provide athletes the full confidence they deserve," the White House said in a statement to the Times, which first reported the news Wednesday. "When U.S. taxpayer dollars are allocated, we must ensure full accountability, and it is our responsibility to ensure those funds are used appropriately."

The White House press office did not immediately reply to a message from USA TODAY Sports.

USADA chief executive officer Travis Tygart said in a statement that he supported the move as "the only right choice to protect athletes' rights, accountability, and fair competition."

"Unfortunately, the current WADA leaders left the U.S. with no other option after failing to deliver on several very reasonable requests, such as an independent audit of WADA's operations, to achieve the transparency and accountability needed to ensure WADA is fit for purpose to protect athletes."
Travis Tygart
USADA chief executive officer

"Unfortunately, the current WADA leaders left the U.S. with no other option after failing to deliver on several very reasonable requests, such as an independent audit of WADA's operations, to achieve the transparency and accountability needed to ensure WADA is fit for purpose to protect athletes," said Tygart, who has criticized WADA.

Tygart also stressed that no government had given more money to WADA since its founding in 2000 than the United States, while explaining that non-payment would have "no impact" on American athletes' ability to compete in international sports.

The $3.6 million owed by the U.S., when automatically matched by the International Olympic Committee, represents about 14% of WADA's $52 million budget for 2024. The U.S. is scheduled to pay $3.8 million for 2025.

Tygart had previously suggested the U.S. could withhold its annual funding of WADA as a way to spark reform following the Chinese swimmers scandal, in which 23 athletes tested positive for the same banned substance, trimetazidine, just a few months before the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. China's anti-doping authority did not publicly disclose the positive tests, as required, and WADA quietly cleared the swimmers after agreeing with China's contention that the positive tests were the result of contamination at a hotel.

When The New York Times and German broadcaster ARD first brought the case to light last spring, WADA leaders moved quickly to defend themselves against claims from critics, including Tygart, that they had effectively swept the case under the rug. WADA then repeatedly and publicly attacked Tygart and the U.S. as trying to politicize sports.

When asked about the ramifications of the U.S. decision to withhold funding, WADA spokesperson James Fitzgerald wrote in an email Wednesday that, under the organization's statutes, any country that does not pay its promised dues is barred from having any representation on WADA's foundation board or executive committee, which help run it. That means Dr. Rahul Gupta, who oversees the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, will no longer sit on the executive committee.

The decision comes as the U.S. prepares to host a string of prestigious international sporting events over the next decade, including the 2026 World Cup for men's soccer, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and the 2034 Winter Games in Salt Lake City.

The New York Times reported that, prior to withholding WADA's funding, the White House researched the possible ramifications of the move and "concluded that it could mean losing out on hosting the 2034 Winter Olympics" – though that seems unlikely given the strength of Salt Lake's bid and the shortage of other interested and well-equipped hosts. Spokespeople for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee did not immediately reply to a message seeking comment.

The IOC officially awarded the 2034 Winter Games to the U.S. in a vote last summer after a contentious meeting in which IOC members ripped, among other things, the Rodchenkov Act, which allows American authorities to pursue criminal charges in doping cases that affect American athletes. U.S. bid leaders attempted to assuage those concerns and pledged to reiterate their support of WADA as "the supreme authority" in the global fight against doping in sports.

Sinner begins Aussie Open title defense against Jarry

Shrivathsa Sridhar
REUTERS

MELBOURNE, Australia – Jannik Sinner begins his Australian Open title defense against Nicolas Jarry while women's champion Aryna Sabalenka takes on 2017 US Open winner Sloane Stephens after the draw for the year's first Grand Slam tennis tournament was made at Melbourne Park on Thursday.

Novak Djokovic launches his latest bid for a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and 25th Grand Slam crown against U.S. wild-card Nishesh Basavareddy, but his path to the Melbourne Park final will not be an easy one.

In the third round Djokovic could face Reilly Opelka, the big-serving American who beat the Serb in Brisbane this week, while third seed Carlos Alcaraz is a potential opponent in the quarterfinals.

Jannik Sinner of Italy hopes to win the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup again. DANIEL POCKETT/GETTY IMAGES

Spaniard Alcaraz, who added the French Open trophy to his collection in 2024, begins his campaign to capture the one Grand Slam that has eluded him so far when he meets Alexander Shevchenko.

World No. 1 Sinner must hit the ground running after being paired with Chilean Jarry, who beat the Italian in their first meeting in 2019 and took him to three sets in a losing effort in Beijing last year.

Women's second seed Iga Swiatek plays Katerina Siniakova while third seed Coco Gauff faces an early challenge against fellow American Sofia Kenin, the Australian Open champion in 2020.

Paris Olympics gold medalist Zheng Qinwen, runner-up last year, meets a qualifier first up and is on a collision course with Sabalenka in the quarterfinals.

Two-time champion Naomi Osaka meets Frenchwoman Caroline Garcia in a rematch of their first-round encounter last year, which the Japanese player lost in straight sets shortly after her return to the tour from a long maternity break.

There are question marks over Osaka's fitness, however, after an abdominal injury forced her to quit while leading Clara Tauson in her first WTA final in almost three years in Auckland on Sunday.

Australia's Nick Kyrgios, who has struggled with injuries since losing to Djokovic in the 2022 Wimbledon final, is due to take on Jacob Fearnley, but his return to Melbourne Park remains in doubt due to an abdominal strain.

Fellow Australian Alex de Minaur has a difficult opener against Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp, who stunned Alcaraz at last year's US Open.

The main draw gets underway on Sunday.

Wolken

Continued from Page 1C

score how fragile the NFL's hold really has been on forcing players to go to college for three years. What if Milstein had filed the case in a different circuit that wasn't in the NFL's backyard? Would a Supreme Court with today's makeup of six conservative justices have taken the case?

These are legitimate questions for which there are no clear answers, but the speculation is interesting. And the NFL obviously took it seriously: When it came time for a new CBA in 2006, this issue was part of the negotiations, and the three-year rule was written specifically into the agreement.

Some sports law and antitrust experts, however, believe that these kinds of age-eligibility requirements could be challenged on different grounds – that those who are harmed most (like a Smith or Clarett) are outside the scope of collective bargaining.

"To me, was a very important part of the argument (being a stranger to the bargaining unit entirely)," Scheindlin said. "If they were to think about it today, the conservative group (on the Supreme Court) would be less concerned about the union's feelings because those people are already players, are retired players, but they already had their shot at the NFL."

The legal arguments are going to be far more complex than most of us nonlawyers can understand. But we all fundamentally can form an opinion on this: Does the three-year rule make sense?

In the NIL era especially, I'm not sure anymore.

Two decades ago, there was a legitimate fear that athletes who weren't physically or mentally ready for the NFL would rush to leave college as soon as possible, and you'd end up with a generation of washouts who didn't get the big NFL payday *and* messed up their education/college development.

Now, valuable college players might be able to make as much or nearly as much money by staying an extra year as they would getting drafted in the middle of the third round. It's just a completely different economic calculation. The idea that a college sophomore, or even perhaps an exceptional freshman, can't physically compete in the NFL no longer should matter. Let the market decide.

"The only reason anybody drafts somebody in the first round is because they're ready to be drafted," Milstein said at the symposium. "And the only reason they play is because they're ready to play."

Smith is, by all accounts, the rare college freshman ready to play in the NFL right now. And he should have that opportunity if he wants it.

Jeremiah Smith celebrates Ohio State reaching the CFP semifinals after defeating Oregon in the Rose Bowl. HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell (45) drives to the basket Wednesday against Thunder forward Kenrich Williams (34). KEN BLAZE/IMAGN IMAGES

Zillgitt

Continued from Page 1C

test, too. Both teams are fun to watch – Cleveland is No. 1 offensively and No. 8 defensively, and Oklahoma City is No. 8 offensively and No. 1 defensively. And they share the basketball – Cleveland had 36 assists on 47 made field goals, and Oklahoma City had 35 assists on 48 made field goals.

Wednesday's game also had 30 lead changes and eight ties. It had an 84-point third quarter and 46-point fourth quarter. Neither team led by more than nine points, and it was a two-point margin – 124-122 Cleveland – with less than two minutes remaining in the fourth quarter.

Allen, an All-Star in 2022, finished with 25 points, 11 rebounds, six assists and three steals, and Mobley, who is moving closer to his first All-Star appearance, had 21 points, 10 rebounds, seven assists, one block and one steal. The two 6-foot-11 bigs (twin towers in today's NBA!) provide an old-school feel while adapting to a modern game.

And the Cavs, under Atkinson, have a modern game with 3-point shooting: No. 1 in 3-point percentage and No. 3 in 3s made per game.

They can beat opponents multiple ways, and they did that against the Thunder, scoring 60 points in the paint on 65.2% shooting and scoring 45 points from 3-point range on 41.7% shooting. Cleveland has a strong inside-outside game with depth.

The Thunder have an MVP candidate in Gilgeous-Alexander, who had 31 points, and if Williams, who had 25 points, nine assists, five rebounds, three steals and a block, doesn't make the All-Star team, that's a problem. And don't forget, Chet Holmgren is expected to return from a hip injury sometime this season, giving OKC more depth.

The Thunder have been building toward this for several seasons.

Maybe one of the teams gets to the Finals. Maybe both. Possibly neither.

But, if it's Thunder-Cavaliers, count me in.

Steelers can't easily outrun their problems

Jarrett Bell
Columnist
USA TODAY

Steelers quarterback Russell Wilson, running up the field last week against the Bengals, says, "When you get into the playoffs, everybody is 0-0. You've got to beat everybody, anyway. That's got to be our focus right now. It's been a tough few weeks, obviously." JOE SARGENT/GETTY IMAGES

It's a new season.

And that, people, pretty much sums up the good news for the Pittsburgh Steelers as they stumble into the NFL playoffs with the funk of a four-game losing streak.

New season? Nobody can spin the bright side of that anything-can-happen challenge better than Russell Wilson, All-Pro optimist, embracing amnesia as a tool with a trip to Baltimore looming.

"When you get into the playoffs, everybody is 0-0," the veteran quarterback said after the Saturday night setback. "You've got to beat everybody, anyway. That's got to be our focus right now. It's been a tough few weeks, obviously."

Nice try. Tough might be an understatement. And not all versions of 0-0 were created equally. The sixth-seeded Steelers (10-7) are the first team since the 1986 New York Jets to win at least 10 games but enter the playoffs with a losing streak of at least four games.

The thought of the Steelers suddenly flicking on the switch for the opening of the playoffs this Saturday night against the Ravens (8 ET, Amazon Prime) represents a lot of wishful thinking, given what has been seen lately.

While Pittsburgh's defense lost its big-play mojo and allowed an average of more than 27 points per game during the slump, the once-formidable offense has been a debacle. The Steelers didn't score more than 17 points in any of the four losses, when they produced a total of four touchdowns.

Blame and drastic patterns cut across the board. Turnovers. Dropped passes. Short-yardage woes. Questionable strategy employed by offensive coordinator Arthur Smith. Pass protection breakdowns. George Pickens.

After the 19-17 loss to the Cincinnati Bengals last Saturday night, coach Mike Tomlin lamented the inability of his offense to make routine plays. That would include the failure to convert on third- and fourth-and-1 plays during one sequence – which used to fall in line with Pittsburgh's physical identity.

"If you can't get a yard, you don't deserve to win," Tomlin said, offering a mantra he has expressed repeatedly over the years.

He's right about this. But they muffed multiple opportunities for big chunk plays, too. On the last snap, a fourth-down chance to perhaps set up for a last-second field goal try from ace kicker Chris Boswell, tight end Pat Freiermuth ran a slant and dropped a seemingly perfect throw. And Freiermuth was the most reliable target all night.

Pickens, the most prolific playmaker for the bulk of the season, was another type of issue. On top of his stat line – zero yards on one catch, three drops – he was seen being corralled by a teammate on the sideline as he apparently shouted toward someone in the home crowd.

What a bad look. Yet it's hardly a surprise now, coming from a third-year pro who has repeatedly demonstrated hotheaded tendencies that can drain energy, disrupt focus and cost his team in myriad ways. Wilson, again, publicly defended Pickens after the game, obviously mindful of the alternative.

"He's been a star for us all season," Wilson said, adding that the three games Pickens missed with a hamstring injury disrupted rhythm. "He's going to be a difference-maker for us in the playoffs. I'm looking forward to that, and what he can do and what we can do together. I'm not blinking on George. If anybody believes in him, I definitely do."

Go ahead, Russ. Speak it into existence. And while you're at it, it wouldn't hurt to talk up the need for the offense to get into gear from the start of the games.

For months, it was a given that the Steelers' substance as a playoff threat would be revealed during a grueling stretch run. After trips to Philadelphia and Baltimore, the Steelers closed at home against Kansas City and Cincinnati. That's three division champs and a red-hot team that barely missed the playoffs while finishing with a five-game winning streak.

No, that never looked easy. The Steelers never led at any point in any of the four games. The first-half deficits had a certain symmetry: 17-3, 17-7, 13-0, 10-0.

For all the benefits of complementary football the Steelers enjoyed in building a 10-3 record and two-game lead in the AFC North, the offense was wrapped in a distinct red flag during the four-game skid. The loss at Philadelphia began with three consecutive three-and-outs, then the next three games began with three-and-outs on the opening series. During the four-game skid, the Steelers had a total of 2 net yards on their four game-opening possessions. Pathetic.

Talk about lacking momentum. That pattern that Pittsburgh takes into the playoffs has dots connected to the sluggish starts. This certainly raises the heat on Smith, the former Atlanta Falcons coach whose game-opening scripts have been a disaster.

When someone asked Wilson about the pattern, he replied, "I don't really want to talk about the past. We've been here for a while."

Of course, what's happened in the recent past doesn't bode well for the challenge against a hot Ravens squad (12-5) carrying the opposite flow with a four-game winning streak. On the visit to M&T Bank Stadium in Week 16, a scrambling Wilson fumbled at the Ravens' 4-yard line in the second quarter, swinging the momentum of a tie game. Then, down 24-17 early in fourth quarter, his pick-six to Marlon Humphrey essentially sealed the 34-17 result.

It's no wonder Wilson doesn't want to dwell on the past.

"We've got to have amnesia going into this," Wilson said. "Just win the next play. Win the next game. We've got to have the best week we can possibly have this week."

Tomlin certainly doesn't have amnesia. As much as he'd like to forget some of lowlights of recent weeks, he won't run from a reality check. "I don't know if you go clean slate," he said. "You'd better learn from these lessons. We're a mentally tough group. It's OK to learn from these lessons and to remember the things that created this. Because there's nothing mystical about it. That's going to be my mentality and that's what I'm going to relate to the guys."

Tomlin, in his 18th season, has extended his streak of never having a losing season as the Steelers coach. But that impressive feat is bogged down by the playoff results. A franchise that displays six Lombardi Trophies hasn't won a postseason game since 2016.

Wilson was brought to Pittsburgh to help change that. And after Tomlin made the switch from Justin Fields in Week 7, it seemed like the jolt Wilson added with his veteran savvy and knack to connect on the deep "moonshot" passes were essential elements. The franchise's best quarterback since Ben Roethlisberger fueled hope for a long-denied deep playoff run.

Now it's just about survival in a different context. Maybe a trip to Charm City will spark some certain flashbacks for another edition of one of the NFL's most intense rivalries. Before the blowout in the last meeting, the Steelers had answers in winning eight of the previous nine matchups against the Ravens dating to 2020, which included a 4-0 mark against Lamer Jackson during that span.

Yet that last matchup, with Jackson aligned with Derrick Henry, meant something, too. Unless you've got amnesia.

New season? That can be viewed as half-full for the Steelers ... or almost empty.

Wild-card intrigue builds from start to finish

Chris Bumbaca
USA TODAY

Packers wide receiver Jayden Reed runs against Eagles linebacker Zack Baun during the first half of their season opener in Sao Paulo, Brazil. KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

"Super" wild-card weekend used to mean something. Putting the moniker – a loose exaggeration of "expanded," since the number of playoff teams went from six in each conference to seven following the 2020 season – ahead of the upcoming wild-card round might be a little far-fetched, though.

The seeding in the AFC played out in a way that "Harbaugh Bowl Pt. 4" did not come to fruition. In the NFC, there will be no first-round rematch between East rivals Washington and Philadelphia. But it's the playoffs, and the time to complain has ended.

Let's instead embark on what has become one of our favorite wild-card week traditions and rank the six games this weekend from worst to first by watchability.

6. No. 7 Denver Broncos at No. 2 Buffalo Bills (Sunday, 1 p.m. ET, CBS/Paramount+)

Salute to the Broncos, who did not wilt down the stretch thanks to the improved play of rookie quarterback Bo Nix, who would be a shoo-in for Offensive Rookie of the Year had Jayden Daniels not been in the same draft class.

But their task is a tall one. Josh Allen is the MVP favorite for a reason, and although Buffalo's defense does not always show up at the same level as the offense, head coach Sean McDermott should scheme his guys into favorable enough situations against the Broncos offense. Allen will be well-rested. In an oxymoronic way, the Broncos may not have the horses to hang in this one.

5. No. 5 Los Angeles Chargers at No. 4 Houston Texans (Saturday, 4:30 ET, NBC/Peacock)

Death, taxes and the Texans playing the Saturday afternoon game to open the postseason. The Texans don't look like the team that made the divisional round last year, and without Stefon Diggs and Tank Dell, C.J. Stroud simply doesn't have the weapons. Chargers defensive coordinator Jesse Minter saw Stroud, the former Ohio State signal-caller, twice as Michigan's defensive coordinator and came out on top both times. Defense will rule the day in this one, so finish your errands early by Saturday evening, because this one could come down to the wire. The action before that might not be too exciting, though.

4. No. 6 Pittsburgh Steelers at No. 3 Baltimore Ravens (Saturday, 8 ET, Prime Video)

The NFL was benevolent enough to give Amazon a decent matchup for its first-ever playoff broadcast, and let's hope Al Michaels doesn't take his benching by NBC from a year ago too hard. The call may not be the most enthusiastic for this one, considering Michaels' periodic grouchiness in the booth and that Kirk Herbstreit will be calling the College Football Playoff semifinal matchup between Texas and Ohio State the night prior.

This AFC North rivalry would usually garner a higher ranking, but the Steelers are on a four-game losing streak and their offense was the reason they almost dropped a spot or two on this list. And the Pittsburgh defense does not look like a traditional one. More than a little Mike Tomlin magic will be needed to pull off the upset – or even make it a close game with MVP candidate Lamar Jackson rolling and Derrick Henry ready to make his Baltimore postseason debut.

3. No. 7 Green Bay Packers at No. 2 Philadelphia Eagles (Sunday, 4:30 ET, Fox)

The health of Jalen Hurts (still in the concussion protocol) is the determining factor in this ranking. If he doesn't play and it's Kenny Pickett or Tanner McKee, it might be tougher on the eyes, even with Saquon Barkley, A.J. Brown, DeVonta Smith and the vaunted Philadelphia O-line.

The Eagles defense should be able to contain Josh Jacobs and the Packers' rushing attack to some degree, and without wideout Christian Watson, quarterback Jordan Love – nursing a throwing hand injury – lacks a true deep threat. Never count out Matt LaFleur's ability to scheme up some positive plays on the ground, but it may be too great of a hill to climb.

2. No. 5 Minnesota Vikings at No. 4 Los Angeles Rams (Monday, 8 ET, ESPN)

For some reason, ever since ESPN picked up a wild-card weekend game, it feels like there has been something missing. Maybe everybody's spent by the time the game rolls around. Maybe the league doesn't award the Disney property the best matchup. Or maybe it's just bad luck. But that should turn around this time.

Vikings head coach Kevin O'Connell will square off against his former boss in Sean McVay. The Rams starters on offense are playing on one week's rest, which they'll need to compensate for their defense; it should be a bounce-back game for Sam Darnold, Justin Jefferson and the Vikings offense. Whoever has the ball last wins?

1. No. 6 Washington Commanders at No. 3 Tampa Bay Buccaneers (Sunday, 8 ET, NBC/Peacock)

Points, points, points. Defenses are not the strong suit of either of these teams, even though both head coaches come from that side of the ball. There aren't many better watches currently than Daniels at the moment, as he's busted out of his rookie slump and will return to Raymond James Stadium, where he made his NFL debut four months ago.

And speaking of good watches, Baker Mayfield developing into the player he is has been delightful. Bucky Irving could be a household name by the end of the contest. Mike Evans, pockets much heavier after extending his 1,000-yard streak, will face off against longtime foe Marshon Lattimore, the ex-New Orleans Saint who was acquired by the Commanders at the deadline with the goal of locking up an opponent's No. 1 in this exact scenario.

Woodland details 'hardest year' in comeback from brain surgery

Adam Schupak
Golfweek | USA TODAY NETWORK

Gary Woodland practices on the first hole green Tuesday while preparing for the Sony Open in Hawaii at Waialae Country Club. SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

HONOLULU – Gary Woodland calls last year the hardest one of his life. Four months after brain surgery in September 2023, he returned to the PGA Tour at Waialae Country Club at the Sony Open in Hawaii.

"It was like I was a rookie again," he said on Wednesday during his pre-tournament press conference. "Everything was new, and it was hard."

Last year was the great unknown. He was grateful to be playing again but the reality was hard to ignore: He had come back too early and wasn't physically ready to play. Add in the emotional toll of returning to places where he had pulled his car off the road the year before and called his wife crying with fear that he was going to die, and it's understandable that his comeback had its fits and starts. There were times he stayed at the same hotel where he had previously experienced multiple seizures.

Perhaps worst of all, he struggled to play with his four kids.

"My brain couldn't keep up. My poor wife has to explain to my kids why Dad has to go to the room because too much energy and excitement," Woodland explained. "So I couldn't be the father I wanted to be."

He hit rock bottom after the third round of the 3M Open in July, his third tournament in a row, calling his wife, Gabby, and saying, "I think I'm dying again; it's all back."

Woodland has been open about his struggles, and the support from the golf world has been uplifting. He's also leaning into the impact and inspiration his story has made on others dealing with similar health challenges.

"I've had grown men come up to me crying that they've been battling brain tumors or battling stuff, and seeing me out here playing again gives them hope," he said. "At the end of the day, I want to have a positive impact in this world. I'd like to have a positive impact on myself playing golf, and I'd like to have a positive impact on my family."

Woodland made 26 starts last season but finished in the top 25 only three times. He said he felt as though he was trying to catch lightning in a bottle but he also realized that if he hadn't played, he wouldn't be where he is right now.

For starters, he resumed working with noted instructor Randy Smith, who Woodland called "a father figure in my life," and he's seen signs that his game has turned the corner. Woodland said he's going to be taking medication indefinitely, but thanks to his team of doctors, he's learned to slow down his heart rate and his thoughts through a series of breathing exercises both in the morning and evening, which take about an hour. Yoga, meditation and chanting are part of his routine too.

"I know what it takes now for me to feel well," he said. "I know what I have to do if I'm going to play multiple weeks in a row. I know the work I have to put in to get myself in that situation. I wouldn't have known that if I didn't go through what I went through last year."

Woodland is in the final year of his exemption for winning the 2019 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. With changes that go into effect in 2026 that reduce the number of fully-exempt cards, he'll need to finish in the top 100 – not the top 125 – this year to remain exempt on the PGA Tour.

But the 40-year-old four-time champion is ready to start his new season on Thursday with renewed purpose and renewed hope.

"I'm as optimistic now about my future as I have been in years," he said.

'NBA of volleyball' debuts

Cydney Henderson
USA TODAY

The "NBA of volleyball" – League One Volleyball (LOVB) – is here.

LOVB Salt Lake defeated LOVB Atlanta 25-22, 27-25, 21-25, 25-21 before a sold-out crowd Wednesday at Gateway Center Arena in Atlanta, marking the first victory in the new women's professional indoor volleyball league.

Veronica Jones-Perry of Salt Lake was named the player of the match with 23 kills, six digs and one block.

"It's really cool seeing a lot of familiar faces across the net," Jones-Perry said after the match. "Really proud of my team. It was a fun environment to play in. Our team showed a lot of really great fight tonight. That's something that we want to be about. I think we made that statement."

LOVB (pronounced "love") is made up of six teams that feature 10 of the 13 Team USA Olympians that won a silver medal at the Paris Games in 2024. Three-time Olympic medalist Kelsey Cook (2016, 2020, 2024) was the first athlete to commit to LOVB, joining LOVB Atlanta. Two-time Olympians Haleigh Washington and Jordyn Poulter (2020, 2024) is on LOVB Salt Lake.

"Five years ago we had this dream that these Olympians who go and win medals at the Olympics shouldn't come home and not have the NBA of volleyball to play in," co-founder Katlyn Gao said Wednesday. "This is the result of five years of building. We are creating a legacy league that is here to stay."

Jordyn Poulter and LOVB Salt Lake got the win in the indoor pro volleyball league's debut Wednesday night. KATHERINE GOODALE/IMAGN IMAGES

WEATHER

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WEEKEND FORECAST

A major winter storm will spread snow from the **Tennessee** Valley and the midwest to the central and southern **Appalachians** and part of the **mid-Atlantic coast** into Friday night. An icy mix zone will extend from near I-20 in the **Mississippi Valley** to the **Carolinas** with rain farther to the south.

Otherwise cold conditions will persist from near the **Rockies** on east with lake-effect snow to ramp up this weekend as a clipper storm with snow drops across the **Midwest**. Snow showers will taper off over the mountains of the **Northwest** and linger over the central and northern **Rockies**.

Santa Ana winds will ease on Friday. A minor Santa Ana is possible Saturday night to Sunday with a moderate to major wind event possible from Monday to Wednesday.

EXTREMES

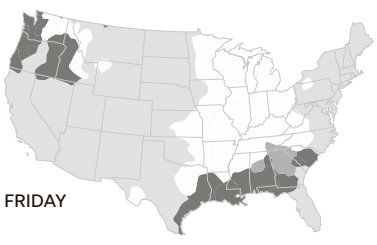
Note: For contiguous 48 states through 3 p.m. Thursday

HOTTEST: 73° Camarillo, Calif.

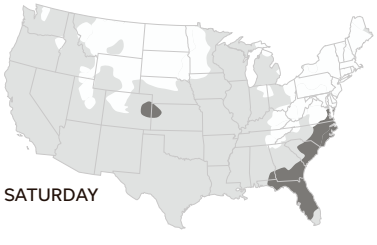
COLDEST: -17° Grayling, Mich.

PRECIPITATION FORECAST

T-storms Rain Snow Ice/mix

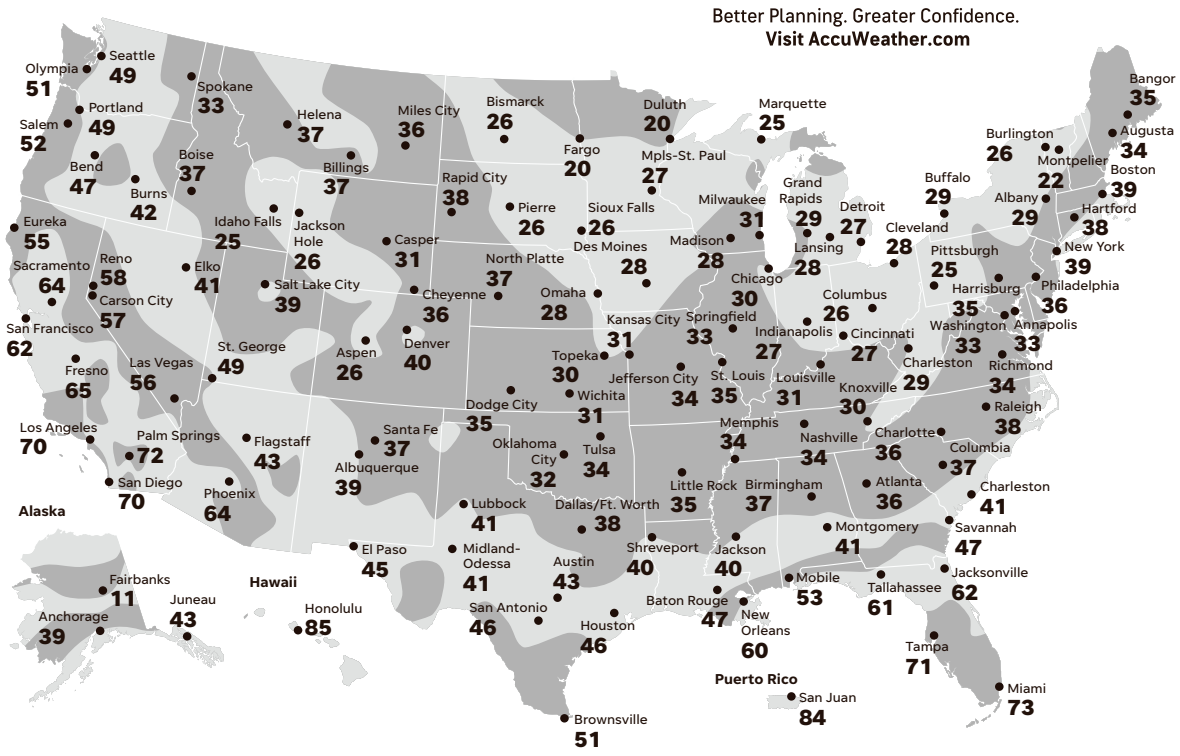


FRIDAY

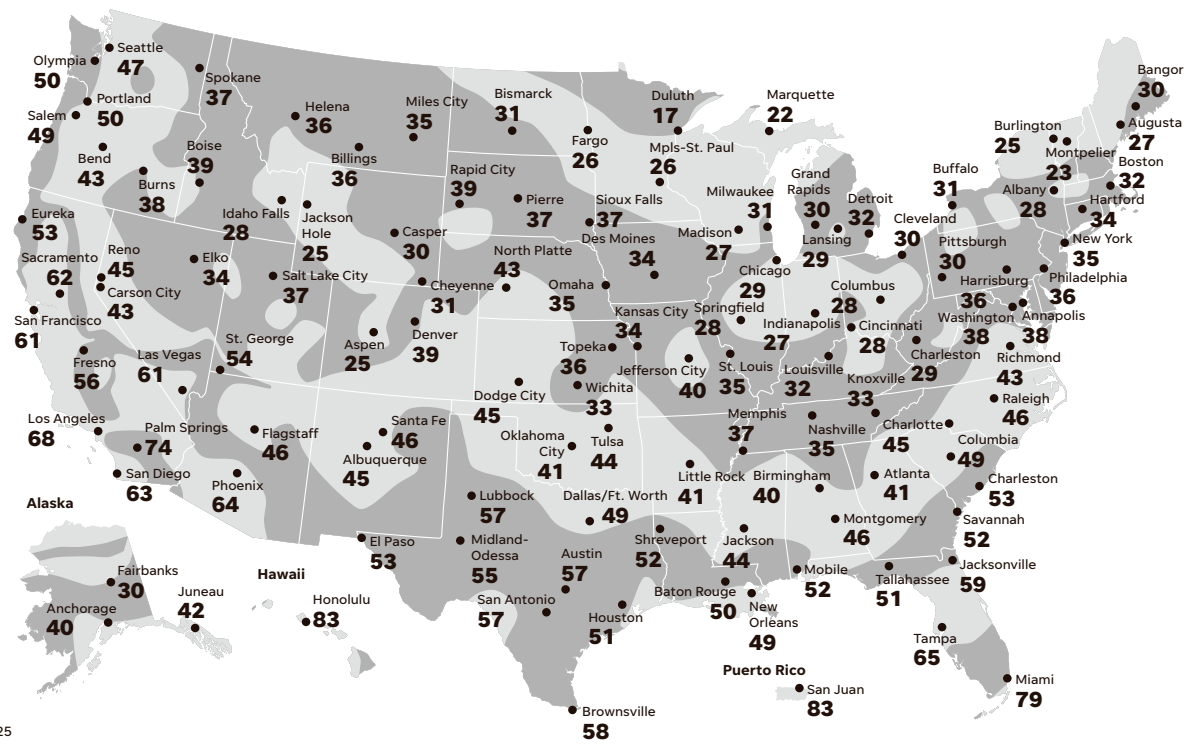


SATURDAY

FRIDAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



SATURDAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



U.S. CITIES

	FRI	SAT
Albany, N.Y.	29/20pc	28/21sn
Albuquerque	39/21s	45/22s
Amarillo, Texas	36/19pc	47/24s
Anchorage, Alaska	39/34sn	40/36r
Atlantic City, N.J.	36/29w	35/26sn
Augusta, Ga.	38/33i	49/24r
Austin, Texas	43/26c	57/34s
Baton Rouge, La.	47/35r	50/34pc
Billings, Mont.	37/32pc	36/26c
Birmingham, Ala.	37/30i	40/21pc
Bismarck, N.D.	26/22c	31/6sn
Boise, Idaho	37/30sn	39/24c
Buffalo, N.Y.	29/23c	31/24sf
Burlington, Vt.	26/19pc	25/19sf
Cedar Rapids, Iowa	29/14sn	33/25c
Charleston, S.C.	41/36r	53/29r
Charleston, W.Va.	29/25sn	29/15sn
Cheyenne, Wyo.	36/30pc	31/18pc
Cincinnati	27/22sn	28/15pc
Cleveland	28/24sn	30/20sf
Columbia, S.C.	37/30i	49/27r
Columbus, Ohio	26/22sn	28/17sf
Corpus Christi, Texas	53/37sh	58/40s
Daytona Beach, Fla.	67/58s	65/41r
Des Moines, Iowa	28/17sf	34/26c
Duluth, Minn.	20/5sf	17/15sn
Durham, N.C.	36/30c	45/21c
El Paso, Texas	45/27s	53/31s
Fairbanks, Alaska	11/5c	30/20pc
Flagstaff, Ariz.	43/17s	46/11s
Fargo, N.D.	20/13s	26/7sn
Fort Myers, Fla.	75/62s	73/54sh
Fort Wayne, Ind.	28/21sn	27/18sf
Fresno, Calif.	65/40s	56/37s
Green Bay, Wis.	30/15sn	26/22c
Harrisburg, Pa.	35/25pc	36/26c
Hartford, Conn.	38/25pc	34/23sf
Indianapolis	27/21sn	27/15pc
Jackson, Miss.	40/33r	44/30pc
Jacksonville, Fla.	62/53c	59/31r
Jefferson City, Mo.	34/17sn	40/29pc
Kansas City	31/13sf	34/27c
Key West, Fla.	74/70pc	77/65s
Knoxville, Tenn.	30/28sn	33/16sn
Lincoln, Neb.	33/20c	41/29c
Little Rock, Ark.	35/19sn	41/25s
Louisville, Ky.	31/26sn	32/17pc
Manchester, N.H.	38/24w	31/21sf
Memphis, Tenn.	34/22sn	37/25s
Milwaukee	31/20sn	31/25pc
Mobile, Ala.	53/35r	52/31pc
Montgomery, Ala.	41/34r	46/28pc
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	39/36r	52/30r
Nags Head, N.C.	37/33w	40/30r
Nashville, Tenn.	34/28sn	35/18pc
Newark, N.J.	40/28s	39/30sn
Norfolk, Va.	39/31pc	42/29sn
Oakland, Calif.	63/44s	65/42s
Oklahoma City	32/20c	41/24s
Omaha, Neb.	28/19c	35/27c
Palm Springs, Calif.	72/46s	74/49s
Pittsburgh	25/22c	30/18sn
Portland, Maine	35/21pc	29/19sn
Portland, Ore.	49/43r	50/41c
Providence, R.I.	40/26s	33/25sf
Raleigh, N.C.	38/31c	46/21i
Rapid City, S.D.	38/30s	39/21sn
Reno, Nev.	58/28pc	45/20s
Richmond, Va.	34/28pc	43/20c
Rochester, N.Y.	28/23c	30/25sn
Sacramento, Calif.	64/43pc	62/39w
San Antonio	46/27w	57/35s
San Jose, Calif.	71/45s	67/41pc
Savannah, Ga.	47/43c	52/29r
Shreveport, La.	40/26c	52/32s
Sioux Falls, S.D.	26/18pc	37/20sn
South Bend, Ind.	30/23sn	28/22sf
Spokane, Wash.	33/28sn	37/27pc
Springfield, Mo.	31/18sn	39/24pc
Springfield, Ill.	33/16sn	28/24pc
St. Louis	35/21sn	35/24pc
Syracuse, N.Y.	27/19pc	31/24sf
Tallahassee, Fla.	61/42c	51/32r
Tampa, Fla.	71/61s	65/46r
Topeka, Kan.	30/12sf	36/29c
Tucson, Ariz.	58/33s	63/34s
Tulsa, Okla.	34/21sn	44/25s
Wichita, Kan.	31/13sf	33/27pc
Wilmington, Del.	35/27s	36/24c
Winston-Salem, N.C.	34/27sn	42/21c

pc Partly cloudy **s** Sunny **sh** Showers **c** Cloudy **t** Thunderstorms **w** Windy **dr** Drizzle **h** Haze **f** Fog **i** Ice **r** Rain **sf** Snowflurries **sn** Snow

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather Inc.** ©2025

Olympic champion caught in LA area fires

Steve Gardner
USA TODAY

As wildfires continue to rage across the Los Angeles area, Olympic champion swimmer Gary Hall Jr. is among the many residents who've suffered devastating losses.

"It was worse than any apocalypse movie you've ever seen and 1,000 times worse," Hall told the Sydney Morning Herald of Australia.

The home Hall was renting in Pacific Palisades and using as the base for his business was consumed by the fire, destroying almost all of his possessions – including his 10 Olympic medals.

"It's mayhem in Los Angeles. We were surrounded by flames. The embers were raining down on me as I jumped into my car," Hall said. "I had time to grab my dog and just a couple of personal items. It's just every person for themselves."

Hall

Hall said the fires came so quickly that he had to leave all his swimming memorabilia behind as he evacuated.

"I did think about the medals. I did not have time to get them," Hall said. "Everyone wants to know did the medals burn? Yeah, everything burnt.

"It's something I can live without. I guess everything is just stuff. It'll take some hard work to start over. What can you do?"

"It's mayhem in Los Angeles. We were surrounded by flames. The embers were raining down on me as I jumped into my car. I had time to grab my dog and just a couple of personal items. It's just every person for themselves."

Gary Hall Jr.
Olympic champion swimmer

The pool at his home where he teaches swimming to kids was also destroyed.

Hall said nearby Sunset Boulevard was "a complete logjam" and that people were abandoning their cars and running to safety. He was able to escape and is now staying with family in San Diego. A GoFundMe page has been set up to support him.

A spokesperson for the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee said they were unaware of Hall's situation and would be reaching out to him. The USOPC released information Wednesday regarding support it is providing its athlete community impacted by the fires.

Hall won back-to-back gold medals in the men's 50-meter freestyle at the 2000 (Sydney) and 2004 (Athens) Olympics. He also won three golds as a member of Team USA's relay teams in 1996 (Atlanta). In addition, he won three silvers and two bronzes during his Olympic career.

Contributing: Tom Schad

USC women get tough road win

Stephen Borelli
USA TODAY

Maryland's Christina Dalce (15) passes the ball from the floor against Southern California's Malia Samuels and Kennedy Smith in the third quarter Wednesday at Xfinity Center. GREG FIUME/GETTY IMAGES

COLLEGE PARK, Md. – Southern California's women's basketball seemed to be having an off night. It was understandable.

Large chunks of their city are burning back home, while the team is on a two-game East Coast swing over five days that has coincided with a burst of frigid weather.

No. 7 Maryland, and many of the 14,735 fans who showed up at Xfinity Center, were throwing everything they had at No. 5 USC: driving and spinning layups, quick floaters and jumpers in the lane and the urgency of a team playing to stay undefeated.

But trailing 68-61 with about five minutes to play, the Trojans felt a calm come over them. It has been with them all season.

"We just kind of have this unwavering confidence in ourselves," says JuJu Watkins, a sophomore guard and national player of the year candidate for USC.

"A lot of it comes from the games you've already been through in tough moments in those big games. So I think that we had a lot of confidence in ourselves and what we work on every day, and it was just a matter of coming together and closing the game out."

Watkins and Kiki Iriafen each had 21 points to help spearhead Southern Cal's 79-74 win that handed Maryland its first loss of the season. But the win seemed to mean much more than that.

"I got a really nice text from our director of marketing at home saying that your team provided us a good two hours of not thinking about kind of what's going on," says Trojans coach Lindsay Gottlieb. "And I think without really knowing it, that's what this team does, right?

"We have a perspective that basketball isn't everything, but when these 40 minutes are in front of us, it's everything to us in that moment. And I think that gives people maybe a sense of being able to take their mind off harder things and have some good ones."

Southern California (15-1, 5-0 Big Ten) was coming off a 92-42 win last Sunday before a sold-out crowd at Rutgers. It was much tougher sledding against Maryland, which has recharged with seven transfers after a rare NCAA Tournament miss last season under Brenda Frese.

One of them, Kaylene Smikle, who arrived this season from Rutgers, scored 14 of her 16 points in the second half to help guard Shyanne Sellers (game-high 26 points) mount a serious upset bid.

Watkins, meanwhile, who scored more points in her initial collegiate season than Caitlin Clark did as a freshman, began missing five of her first seven shots. She struggled to find a rhythm all night and turned the ball over eight times, tying her second-highest total this season.

But Southern Cal managed to slow Maryland from its transition game, where the high-energy Sellers can score at will, and began to move the ball around freely to find open shooters and cutters.

Watkins or a teammate consistently found Iriafen, a 6-foot-3 forward and transfer from Stanford, who drove and made a left-handed layup and was fouled with 1:28 left. She made her free throw to give USC the lead for good, 75-72.

The play was assisted by Rayah Marshall, who then delivered a key block on Maryland's ensuing possession. Marshall finished with four blocks and 15 rebounds.

"She has a magnetism," Gottlieb says of Marshall. "I think the team believes in her so much. She's kind of the energy giver to other people. She's a little bit under the weather, fought through it. I challenged her a bit at halftime because, (Maryland's Christina) Dalce, I thought was getting to the boards. And she just can own it and take messages, and do what we need her to do. I mean, the block she had at the end, the ability to kind of be a playmaker for us and put (Watkins and Iriafen) in action. She can pass and find them off it.

"She's been terrific and just a huge part of any success that we're having."

Watkins, who entered the game third in the country at 25.1 points per game, stayed aggressive as well. She picked up her fourth foul, to loud applause, with 6:44 left in the game. But she nailed a jumper from the top of the key and hit two free throws in the final three minutes to help seal the win.

Iriafen and Watkins have scored in double digits in all 16 of USC's games this season.

"Every time we show up with these two young women here," Gottlieb said, sitting between Watkins and Iriafen after the game, "we know we've got the best duo in the country. Other teams are going to make things hard for them.

"They were both in foul trouble, and I thought they led us. They had composure, they made plays they're supposed to make, and also empowered their teammates to do what they did to help us get get this win. It's a really big win on the road for our program."

Gottlieb, in her fourth season as Trojans coach, led USC to its second tournament title in Pac-12 in 2024. In its final season in the conference, the team reached the Elite Eight behind Watkins' 920 points, which set a school season record.

USC fell to Connecticut in the step before the Final Four in 2024, but on Dec. 21 it got its first win over UConn in program history in its first trip to the East Coast this season.

That game drew nearly 16,000 fans. Wednesday's mostly pro-Maryland crowd had just over 14,000. It was boisterous on a night a game tipped off after 8:40 in the aftermath of a snowstorm that hit the region this week.

"I definitely think we learned a lot about ourselves," says Frese, who is in her 23rd season at Maryland and has gone 596-161 at the school. "And this group, you know, wants the moment. They want to play the best. And as a coach, I mean, you really love that, and you love seeing them welcome this big stage tonight.

"To get over 14,000 fans here for a late tip on a weeknight really speaks volumes to our game and shows what tremendous fans that we have."

Before the game, Frese spoke with Gottlieb and offered her support to her and families in Los Angeles, where USC now returns and is scheduled to play Penn State on Sunday.

"We've been on the road for whatever it is now, five days, and our city is on fire," Gottlieb says. "It's been hard to be away and watch those scenes. So just want to send our thoughts and prayers to the first responders, to those impacted, and I have friends that have been displaced, and I know that our players probably do, too. So that's more important than what we're doing."

Pro boxer Claressa Shields challenges Jake Paul

Josh Peter
USA TODAY

Boxer Claressa Shields is preparing for a world title heavyweight bout against Danielle Perkins on Feb. 2, but she's happy to discuss fighting someone else.

Jake Paul.

"I don't know if it's something that can happen, but I know that I can whip Jake Paul's (expletive) and people who are against that are just sexist and they don't know boxing," Shields, the most decorated female boxer in history, told USA TODAY Sports.

"It's very strange to me that they think that a YouTuber can beat a woman boxer who has two Olympic gold medals, (multiple) world titles and fought as a heavyweight. ...

"He does not have the experience. They talk about power. You can have power, but you got to have the skills to land a punch."

A representative for Paul did not immediately respond to requests for comment made by voicemail and text message.

Shields, 29, is 15-0 as a pro with three knockouts. She is 5-foot-8 and is expected to weigh in at about 175 pounds for her second consecutive heavyweight bout.

Paul, 27, is 11-1 with seven knockouts and has fought mostly as a cruiserweight, which has a 200-pound maximum at weigh-in. He is coming off a victory over Mike Tyson by unanimous decision – which did not impress Shields.

"Jake Paul showed that he has not gotten better with his skills," she said. "He needs to train harder and better.

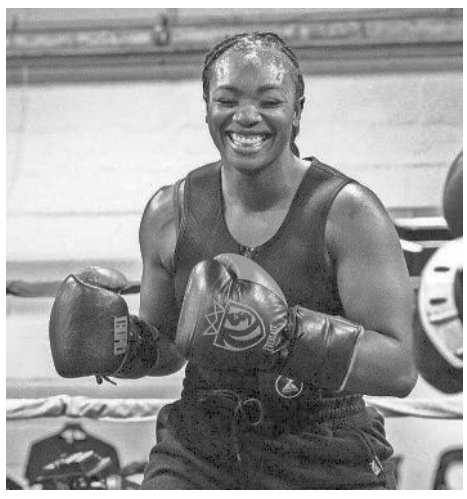
"And honestly, I think the girl that I'm getting ready to fight against, Danielle Perkins, can beat Jake Paul, too."

Shields' beef with Paul appears to stem in part from Paul having picked Savannah Marshall to beat Shields in 2022. The only defeat of Shields' career came against Marshall as an amateur in 2012 at the world championships.

Shields avenged the loss by beating Marshall by unanimous decision.

"(Paul) tried to apologize and all that other type of stuff after he picked Savannah to beat me in a fight," Shields said.

"But (expletive) that apology. Fight me."


Claressa Shields is working out in preparation for a fight in February.
DAVID RODRIGUEZ MUNOZ/USA TODAY NETWORK

Ohio State, Texas set for epic Playoff clash

Paul Myerberg
USA TODAY

Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers runs against Arizona State during the Peach Bowl. BRETT DAVIS/IMAGN IMAGES

Texas and Ohio State meet in the Cotton Bowl having taken two different paths into the semifinals of the College Football Playoff – one with a pair of eye-opening blowouts, the other by surviving and advancing through a double-overtime thriller in the quarterfinals.

There's no doubt the Buckeyes have been the most impressive playoff team through two rounds. After ripping through Tennessee to open the tournament, Ohio State avenged a regular-season loss to Oregon by taking a 34-0 lead in the Rose Bowl on the way to an easy 41-21 win.

Texas didn't have too much trouble against Clemson in the opening round, though the Tigers did crawl within a touchdown in the second half. Things were far more difficult in the Peach Bowl against Arizona State. Down 24-8 in the fourth quarter, the Sun Devils came back to force overtime but lost 39-31 in the second extra frame.

Ohio State will look to continue this torrid run with another marquee win against the last team standing from the SEC. The Longhorns can make an epic statement by stopping the Buckeyes' seemingly unstoppable march to the national championship.

Either way, the consensus is that the winner will be favored in the championship game against the winner of the Orange Bowl between Penn State and Notre Dame, who played Thursday night.

Here are the three factors that will determine the Cotton Bowl:

Can Quinn Ewers keep this up?

Ewers spent most of the regular season scrutinized for his production while backup quarterback Arch Manning looms over his shoulder, with the redshirt freshman playing well enough in limited spurts to ask: Is Ewers the best option for the Longhorns?

That question should be put to rest after his performance in the Peach Bowl. With the running game sputtering, Ewers had one of the best games of his college career – and easily his best game since putting up five touchdowns against Florida in early November – by completing 20 of 30 attempts for 332 yards and three touchdowns against one interception, highlighted by a near-perfect drive to set up a missed field goal to end regulation and two picture-perfect scoring strikes in overtime.

Texas simply operates at a higher level when Ewers' production matches his potential. Against Ohio State, he'll need to carry over his play to keep the Longhorns on track to win what should be a high-scoring game against one of the best offenses in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

Can Ohio State be stopped?

Tennessee's defense allowed more than 400 yards just twice during the regular season and held all but two opponents under 5.9 yards per play. All the Buckeyes did was rack up 473 yards on 7.4 yards per play. Against Oregon, Ohio State put together one of the best performances by an offense in Rose Bowl history with 500 yards on 8.8 yards per play.

Clearly, this offense has turned the page on another miserable loss to Michigan. And the Buckeyes have done so in part by shying away from the meat-and-potatoes game plan that flopped against the Wolverines in favor of a more wide-open style predicated on elite receiver play from Jeremiah Smith and Emeka Egbuka. Smith had 187 yards and two scores against Oregon and Egbuka has a combined 10 grabs for 153 yards in two playoff games.

But keying on stopping Will Howard and these receivers would open things up for TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, who through 14 games have combined for 1,849 yards and 20 touchdowns on 6.2 yards per carry.

While the Texas defense was seen as an asset heading into the Peach Bowl, the Sun Devils became just the second team to run for more than 200 yards on the Longhorns since 2021 and the first to have 500 yards of offense since last year's loss to Washington in the national semifinals.

Can the SEC beat the Big Ten?

Not in this postseason. In addition to the Buckeyes' win against Tennessee, the Big Ten is 3-1 in traditional bowl games against the SEC: Southern California beat Texas A&M in the Las Vegas Bowl, Michigan beat Alabama in the ReliaQuest Bowl, Illinois topped South Carolina in the Citrus Bowl and Iowa lost by a field goal to Missouri in the Music City Bowl.

These results will color the perception of which league rules the FBS. This season, that conference is clearly the Big Ten. But what does that tell us about the Cotton Bowl?

Maybe nothing. But heading into another pairing between these two powerhouse leagues, it's impossible to ignore how the Big Ten has owned the postseason at the cost of the SEC's national reputation.

Deion would consider NFL on one condition

Brent Schrotenboer
USA TODAY

Colorado's Shilo Sanders (21), coach Deion Sanders, quarterback Shedeur Sanders and social media producer Deion Sanders Jr. pose after a game in November. RON CHENOY/IMAGN IMAGES

Deion Sanders previously said he was "not one bit" interested in becoming an NFL coach one day, no matter how much success he might have at the college game.

He told "60 Minutes" that in 2022, saying it would be hard for him to coach players who make a lot of money and don't "truly love the game" of football.

But in an interview that aired Wednesday on ABC, the Colorado head coach added a new condition to his interest in an NFL coaching job.

"You know what?" Sanders said on the show "GMA3: What You Need to Know."

"The only way I would consider is to coach my sons."

He then emphasized he was talking about his sons, plural, not just his quarterback son Shedeur, but also his safety son, Shilo. Both recently completed their final years of college eligibility playing for him at Colorado. Shedeur is projected as a top NFL draft pick in April, while Shilo is not.

Sanders, 57, has been the subject of speculation about his future in coaching, mostly because next fall otherwise would be his first without his sons, whom he's coached since youth football.

The Pro Football Hall of Famer appeared on "GMA3" to promote the new season of his "Coach Prime" documentary series, which focuses on his last year coaching Shedeur and Shilo. In that series, Sanders said he was "pretty much 99 to 100% sure (that the 2024 season) would be the last time that I have an opportunity to coach my kids."

He also recently suggested a new contract was in the works to stay at Colorado. His contract runs through 2027. He recently finished his second season in Boulder with a 9-4 record.

"I love Colorado," he said on "GMA3." "Now I love my Buffaloes. I love everything that we're building. I love everything that we're doing, and I love Boulder, Colorado. I do, immensely."

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USA TODAY WEEKEND EXTRA

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2025 | **SECTION D**

NATIVE AMERICAN ART

Artist Kevin Horace Quannie displays his work at the renowned Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market in Phoenix last year. JOEL ANGEL JUAREZ/USA TODAY NETWORK

A QUIET REVOLUTION

Traders and collectors long defined Indigenous art. Now artists want to reclaim their vision

Debra Utacia Krol Arizona Republic | USA TODAY NETWORK

Liz Romero had purchased a selection of beaded wallets from a Native wholesaler, planning to sell them in her small art shop and display some of them at a local powwow in October. She had been assured they were authentic, the work of Native artists. ● But they were bogus, counterfeit. Romero got the bad news at the powwow from several people who saw the items, including the chairman of her own tribe, the Redding Rancheria in Northern California. She immediately removed the wallets from her table. ● Romero buys handmade items from Native artists across the West, and she'd bought these – the wallets, some earrings and necklaces – from a Native artist from Bloomfield, New Mexico. ● "I never thought to question him on the wallets," she said.

Romero did some research and found that the wallets, offered for sale on Amazon, are made by Indians, but not from the U.S. – from India. Adding insult to injury, the Amazon wallets were priced at $35, and she said she paid $70 to the purported artist.

Romero said the earrings she accepted as authentic turned out to be offered on Temu, another aggregator site.

She told her story on Facebook and refunded buyers of the counterfeit items, absorbed the cost and placed them in a section of her store reserved for imported and non-Native-made items.

"The sad part," she said, "is that my little business thrives off a good deal or a purchase that would make me money and this is the second time someone's got me."

What happened to Romero happens often to Native artists, many of whom rely on sales of their creations to put food on the table, pay for gas and utilities and clothes on their kids' backs.

But contending with the tsunami of cheaper, fraudulent art is just one challenge in a world where Native artists must navigate a knot of sellers, dealers, museum operators and other gatekeepers who have long tried to define Native art, pushing artists to make what sells.

Apache artist Douglas Miles calls it the "Native American Industrial Arts Complex," which is currently locked in a struggle between the natural growth of arts over the years and the pressure on Indian artists to continue producing salable, traditional pieces – even if it's

See RECLAIMING, Page 2D

Diana Sue Uqualla, adorned in turquoise jewelry, prepares a willow stick for weaving at her artist booth at Grand Canyon National Park in Grand Canyon Village. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

Inside

Master artists inspire change in Native art

Sculptor Doug Hyde and basket maker Jeremy Frey push the envelope to break down walls. **4D**

Academics plays key role in securing future

Artists learn how to evolve, avoid ripoffs and stand against outside pressures. **5D**

ILLUSTRATION BY GETTY IMAGES

Reclaiming

Continued from Page 1D

not the art they want to make.

The quiet revolution spreading across Indian Country's art world

From kitchen tables strewn with beads, basketry materials or wood shavings, to Laguna Pueblo artist Pat Pruitt's huge studio packed with computers loaded with graphics software, CNC milling machines, drills, lathes and welding equipment, some artists question how their art is perceived by collectors, galleries, museums and the public.

They ask how the art scene evolved to where it is now and why so many artists don't have the same regard and access to mainstream galleries and museums as their non-Indigenous peers. At the same time, they're dealing with a flood of counterfeit pieces that undercut their prices and their incomes.

Artists question why gatekeepers, primarily non-Indians, dictate what is shown in museums and offered on shop shelves. They increasingly ask who determines what is "art" versus "craft." And they chafe at lingering ideas among some in the business about whether art is "Indian enough." Some artists' work was initially rejected for this reason.

Some are moving toward marketing and presenting art through new venues such as direct marketing, supported by some nonprofit arts and entrepreneur support groups.

Others continue using the market-museum-gallery circuit because they have bills to pay and kids to put through college, or simply because it's the path they know and are comfortable with.

They also question the integrity of some longtime non-Indian businesses like the well-known Gilbert Ortega shops. Native artists winced two years ago when Gilbert Ortega Jr. accosted Native performers in front of his store in Old Town Scottsdale, Arizona, during a Super Bowl promotion.

But a growing number of artists are moving away from these traditional pathways to carve their own roads to success.

Artists such as Pruitt, photographer Cara Romero, multimedia artist Anna Tsouhlarakis and the Katoney brothers – Marlowe, a weaver, and Yancey, a muralist and tattoo artist – wield ever-evolving materials and techniques to create new forms or reinterpret old forms and motifs. They are bursting through the box of what some collectors, curators and more traditional artists think Indigenous art should fit into.

And at least one, Passamaquoddy basketmaker Jeremy Frey, literally set the box ablaze, emerging to achieve international acclaim.

Original purpose of Native pieces was practical, spiritual or cultural

At the Heard Museum in Phoenix last March, artists unloaded beadwork and baskets, paintings, pottery and photography, jewelry, stone and wood sculptures, textiles and delicate works in glass.

Artists or consigners completed entry forms while workers ensured each piece or set was in one of eight categories, ready for judges to examine, discuss and sometimes dissect that evening.

It was juried competition day at the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market, the country's second-largest Indigenous arts showplace.

Each artist had applied in advance with detailed photos of their work to be adjudicated. Once they passed, they paid a booth fee ranging from $250 to $1,200. With travel and lodging costs, artists often pony up as much as $3,000 for a two-day window to show their works and make enough money to last until the next market.

Winning a ribbon, and the check that goes with it – the top prize this year was $25,000 – boosts the artist's career and their bottom line.

The Heard Fair and other major Indian art markets, museum shops and galleries, mostly overseen by non-Indians, have long accounted for a major portion of Native artists' annual revenues.

But while pursuing the hundreds of pieces for sale outside the galleries, visitors to the Heard can see Ancestral Pueblo pottery from the Four Corners decorated with cultural motifs like rain, clouds and family symbols. Cotton strands spun and dyed with natural dyes nearly 1,000 years old are artfully draped over the small storage pot in which they were rediscovered, left behind by people who prepared them as they searched for a more reliable source of water more than 800 years ago.

Another display of the first peoples of the Salt River Valley, the Huhugam, features pottery nearly as old, as well as small effigies. One piece with inlaid turquoise chips showed how the ancestors of the O'odham adorned themselves.

Artist Pat Pruitt works with untraditional metals and uses modern computer-aided technology and cutting-edge machining equipment in his at-home art studio in Laguna Pueblo, N.M. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

"The railroad single-handedly created an environment and an industry just by its presence. Our people were able to design, develop and produce ceramic ware that had symbology on it that was representative of who we are. We didn't really think twice about it, it just happened, and no one questioned it."

Pat Pruitt
On the commodification of Laguna pottery in the early 20th century

But one thing these and other Indigenous peoples have in common: They have no word for "art." These pieces expressed cultural values, visualized beneficial weather or environmental conditions or depicted spiritual purposes.

What was once created for utilitarian, cultural or religious purposes caught the eye of settlers eager to visit "Indian Country," creating a market for what is now called art.

First American Art Magazine, one of the first such publications owned and operated by Native people, published a timeline of Indigenous art history in the Americas that denoted how the Native art world has changed over centuries.

Indigenous art: From cultural touchstone to commodity

After contact and colonization, Spanish settlers brought the practice of silversmithing to the Southwest in the late 19th century. Two of the best-known early jewelers were Atsidii Sání, believed to be one of the first Diné silversmiths, and Slender (or Slim) Maker of Silver, the patriarch of the Peshlakai family who's known as the first artist to have an assembly line of silversmiths more than 10 years before Henry Ford.

Navajo, Zuni and other Native silversmiths who took up the trade first worked in silver melted down from coins. They later added turquoise, sparking a sea change in how people around the Four Corners created items for sale or to build wealth out of silver and stones. Zunis had worked with cut stone earlier on and quickly adapted to the new techniques.

The Spanish-influenced jewelry soon joined more traditional pottery, weavings and carvings as a way for Native people to obtain canned food, metalware, and even horses and buggies.

At the same time, Native people started producing jewelry and other items for sale, and trading posts run by government-licensed traders sprang up in and near tribal communities. Traders learned to operate on a barter system, according to the book "Fred Harvey Jewelry, 1900-1955" by the late Dennis June, himself a longtime trader. Indians wanted not only durable goods but brilliantly dyed commercial yarns and, of course, silver coins that could be melted down for more jewelry.

Lorenzo Hubbell, who operated a trading post in the Navajo community of Ganado in Arizona, is said to be the first to encourage Navajo women to make rugs instead of blankets since he had a storeroom of colorful, commercially made, wool trade blankets and didn't need more. Weavers started creating Oriental-style rugs in traditional Navajo motifs, and a new art form was born.

Some trading posts were operated by families, and at least one maintained the tradition. The McGees and their in-laws have been running trading posts for more than 100 years since acquiring the Keams Canyon Trading Post from Hubbell.

Joyce June, Dennis' widow, and her cousin, Bruce McGee, used to run the hills around Keams Canyon. Her parents moved to the Hopi reservation after marrying and lived without running water or electric service.

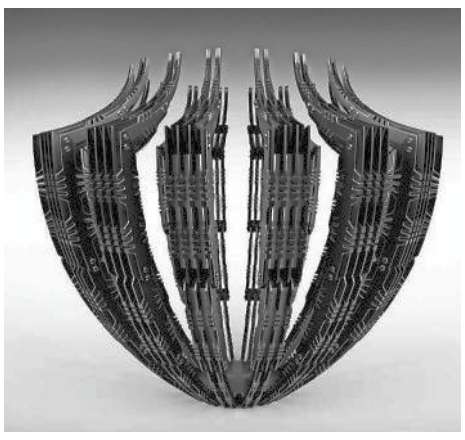
After Joyce met and married trader Dennis, the Junes opened up their own gallery in Scottsdale's Old Town district. Dennis became fascinated with Harvey-era jewelry and researched his book for 10 years, she said.

"He bought a collection, which is what started it all," Joyce said. "There was always a question about the souvenir jewelry. And so this book explains how it was all produced."

Dennis died in 2021, and June kept the gallery going until April 2024.

Like June, McGee grew up surrounded by Native people and the art they created. "I blame Joyce's dad for getting me into the business," McGee said wryly. "He was my mentor."

But William McGee, Joyce's dad, only had daughters and wanted a son. He persuaded his brother to name his new son William B. McGee, known as Bruce for short. Bruce and his cousins, including June, split their childhoods between the Hopi Mesas and the city of Mesa, a Phoenix suburb.



A metal sculpture by Pruitt resembles traditional pottery. PROVIDED BY PAT PRUITT

"I wish every kid could grow up like I did," McGee said. "Race wasn't an issue. There was no difference between one person and another." His mom put on banquets and programs in the community, and some Hopi women became "grandmas."

Race became an issue when the McGees moved to Holbrook. "The kids teased me because I had this accent," he said. But McGee's first exposure to the trading post business came shortly after he married.

"My dad had me working with him at the Piñon Trading Post even though I couldn't speak a word of Navajo," he said. Dad worked the young McGee hard and pressured him to do well.

"We opened when the sun came up and closed when the sun went down." If a local resident needed supplies after closing time, McGee was expected to open the store.

So, McGee asked if he could make another trader, Billy Malone, his boss instead. The experience changed his life. He learned the trade from the patient Malone, which led to a more than 70-year career in Indian art, including directing the Heard Museum Shop.

McGee retired from the Heard last year.

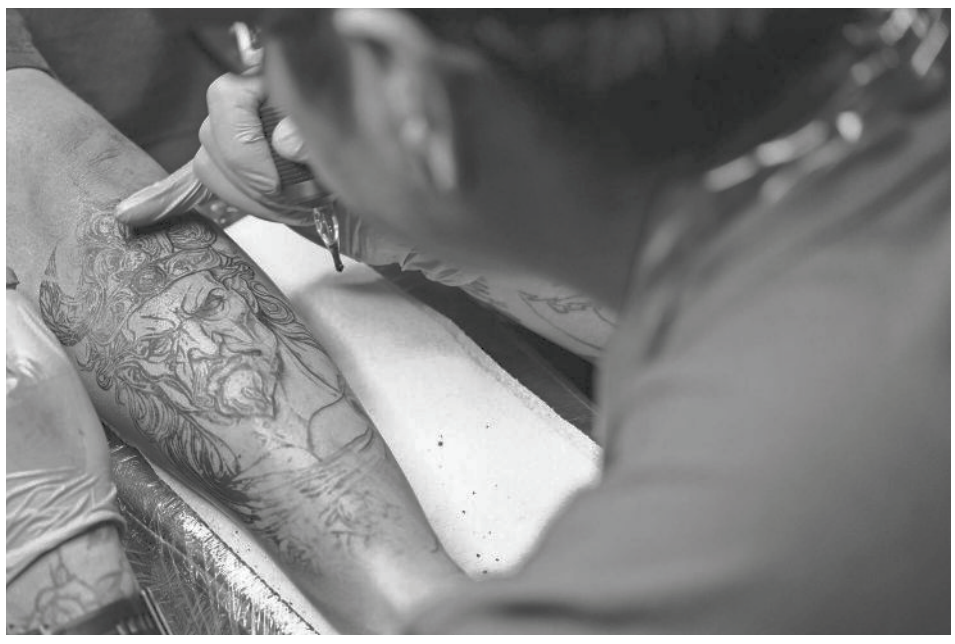
Fred Harvey's 'Indian Rooms' and the start of Indian markets

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the Santa Fe Railway stretched its metal fingers across the nation, giving birth to not only rapid transcontinental travel but to a growing middle-class pursuit: tourism.

Restaurateur Fred Harvey's hospitality empire, which grew to include hotels, guided tours and retail, launched its Indian Department in 1902. The Indian Rooms and the Fred Harvey Indian Building in Albuquerque, New Mexico, offered a variety of Native pieces, including Navajo weavings, Pueblo pottery and Native jewelry. Indigenous art collector and dealer Herman Schweizer was given the task of stocking the venues with enticing items.

Indigenous artisans and entrepreneurs readily adapted to the influx of visitors including the Laguna Pueblo, whose land was bisected by the railroad.

Pruitt said Laguna pottery became more elaborate and commodified almost instantaneously: "The railroad single-handedly created an environment and an industry just by its presence. Our people were able to design, develop and produce ceramic ware that had symbology on it that was



Yancey Katoney is a tattoo artist as well as a muralist whose work can be seen on buildings in Winslow, Ariz. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

representative of who we are. We didn't really think twice about it, it just happened, and no one questioned it."

Back in Albuquerque, Schweizer dealt with customer complaints that the heavy silver and stone jewelry prized by Navajos and other Southwestern Indigenous peoples as portable wealth was too heavy for slender tourist necks and wrists. Schweizer approached his silversmith sources and asked them to make their pieces lighter, with thinner silver stock. The big hunks of turquoise preferred by Navajos shrank in size or disappeared entirely.

He presented silversmiths with a line of preferred stamped designs like arrows, thunderbirds, tipis (although no Southwestern tribe ever used the conical hide homes), snakes and arrowheads.

Collectors can be particularly startled by one symbol in the "Harvey palette" of stampings: the nohokos, or whirling log, also known as the swastika. Once the Nazis appropriated the symbol for well-being and protection, Native people mostly quit using it until recently, when they felt it was time to reclaim their symbols.

The birth of the 'Native American Industrial Art Complex'

"One of the biggest problems is that we Native people allowed white collectors, curators and academics to define our work in the 1920s and '30s," said Douglas Miles, an artist and designer who heads up Apache Skateboards.

Miles' statement is rooted in the actions of agency heads, art impresarios and museum staff in the 20th century.

John Collier became head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1933 when the nation was in the throes of the Great Depression. Tribes were in even worse shape, and Collier, a social justice advocate, instituted several reforms to federal Indian policy. One of those policies involved the role art played in sustaining Native cultures that previous federal administrations had suppressed.

"Collier was really concerned about the fact that ceremonies or dancing were being suppressed," said Jennifer McLerran, scholar, curator and author of the book "A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943."

Collier held a romanticized view of Indigenous cultures and was also familiar with the Meriam Report, which detailed the federal government's failures in dealing with tribes and the dire conditions in tribal communities. The report also tied arts and handcrafts to ceremony and religion.

Although Collier was extremely interested in supporting cultural continuance and wanted Native peoples to determine their own destiny, McLerran said, he also wanted them to remain in their traditional communities and carry on with their Indigenous ways of life.

Tourism posed an issue with Collier. "Through the 1910s and 20s, the Hopi Snake Dance was huge," she said. People flocked to the mesas to observe the dance. "He became very concerned about how American tourism was affecting the spiritual and ceremonial life, especially of the Hopi and a number of Pueblo groups."

Tourism also had a significant impact on the quality of art produced by tribal people. Just as the Fred Harvey Company learned, "tourists wanted small objects they could travel with and could easily acquire, that weren't very expensive," McLerran said.

At the same time, art curator Rene d'Harnoncourt, who worked with folk artists in Mexico, was interested in generating better quality art to offer collectors.

Collier was also friends with the Hubbell trading family, known for their marketing expertise. Son Roman Hubbell was the mastermind behind creating the world's largest Navajo rug, now on display at the Affeldt Mion Museum at the La Posada Hotel in Winslow, Arizona, to attract tourists to the family's Winslow trading post.

"Hubbell was trying to generate this very, very upscale wealthy market in the 1930s," McLerran said.

Collier was instrumental in establishing the Indian Arts and Crafts Board within the Department of the Interior in 1935 to promote and preserve Native material culture. D'Harnoncourt came on board as an administrator.

While at the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, d'Harnoncourt organized one of the first national exhibits of Native arts at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco in 1939. And, in 1941, d'Harnoncourt and Denver Art Museum curator Frederic H. Douglas mounted the exhibit "Indian Art of the United States" at New York City's Museum of Modern Art.

McLerran said these grand displays and marketing events were both good and bad for Native art.

Hollis Chitto, a Mississippi Choctaw who also has Laguna and Isleta Pueblo heritage, won Best in Show for his beaded artwork at the Indian Fair and Market at the Heard Museum in Phoenix on March 2, 2024. JOEL ANGEL JUAREZ/USA TODAY NETWORK

"The exhibitions were successful in generating niche markets for particular things," she said. But the public didn't talk about expertise or technique, responding instead to the stereotypical "fur, the feathers and all that kind of thing."

One non-Native art teacher also contributed to that stereotyping. Dorothy Dunn, who had studied several Native cultures, opened the first studio school at the Santa Fe Indian School in 1932.

Dunn taught a technique she developed, the "Studio Style." She believed Native artists could all be gathered into one universal style. Paintings from this period are distinguished by their flat appearance, with no depth of field or any other realistic depictions, and opaque earth tones.

While Collier and d'Harnoncourt were developing art as an economic driver, museums came into play as centers of Native art and as repositories for what many social scientists feared were "vanishing" tribal cultures. Classically trained curators started studying Native art and became known as experts in the genre.

The two largest Indian markets in the U.S. – Santa Fe in 1922 and the Heard Indian Fair and Market in 1958 – were founded by non-Native museums. The Santa Fe Indian Market was first sponsored by the Museum of New Mexico, while museum volunteers started the Heard Indian Fair.

Other major Indian markets are also run by museums, including the Autry, the Eiteljorg and the Abbe.

These moves plus pressure from non-Indian collectors and gallery owners with a Eurocentric point of view led to the current system, the "Native American Industrial Art Complex," Miles said. "Non-Natives step in and define our cultures and interpret our creative process," he said.

Native art galleries put "elite" art on display. And, gallery owner and Indian studies student Mark Bahti said, museums are primarily interested in similar art, "art that knocks your socks off." The quest for only premier art leaves most artists who produce good quality but not world-class works with little if any support system to sustain them and their families.

Miles said the current system is "a machine that takes and sells art to others and each other." The system is a millstone on the business, he said, but it's hard to escape, because it's the only game in town. "It creates roadblocks and gatekeepers."

And, most importantly, said Miles, a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, "it all takes from Indian and collective agency."

Loloma and Howe among artists who broke the mold of 'Indian' art

But in the mid- and late 20th century, as the market for Native art and the Indian markets that drew collectors grew, some Native artists sought to paint, sculpt or carve their own visions and explore more contemporary genres alongside their non-Indian peers.

Some, like Charles Loloma, created jewelry with intricately cut, nontraditional stones like lapis, sugilite, pearls and diamonds. Others migrated to abstract imagery.

But these artists and their works weren't always welcomed by collectors, dealers and curators.

In 1958, Yanktonai Dakota artist Oscar Howe entered a Native art competition at the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Howe, who was called Mazuha Hokshina (Trader Boy), was a graduate of Santa Fe Indian School. He had been taught Dunn's Studio Style, but he abandoned it for a more personal and abstract style.

Art critics agree Howe's style was punctuated by dynamic motion, bright colors and pristine lines. Nevertheless, the Philbrook rejected the work, "Unimi Wacipi (War and Peace Dance)," saying it wasn't "Indian" enough.

Incensed, Howe wrote a letter that reverberated across Indian Country and the art world:

"Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting that is the most common way? We are to be herded like a bunch of sheep, with no right for individualism, dictated to as the Indian has always been, put on reservations and treated like a child and only the White Man knows what is best for him. ... Well, I am not going to stand for it. I only hope the Art World will not be one more contributor to holding us in chains."

Howe went on to become an internationally acclaimed modernist painter who kept his roots planted firmly in Dakota territory.

Others soon followed Howe's lead.

When the Santa Fe Indian School, and the Studio Style it taught, closed, a residential high school and later a university dedicated exclusively to Native arts took over the campus.

The Institute of American Indian Arts opened in 1962 with a group of master Native artists including Cherokee artist Lloyd Kiva New in charge. Early faculty include sculptor Allan Houser, a Chiricahua Apache; Luiseño painter Fritz Scholder; and Hopi jewelers Charles and Otellie Loloma.

Many premier Native American artists have attended, taught or done both at IAIA. The university also has a museum where it displays contemporary works of its students and graduates.

But even with IAIA's cutting-edge incubation for new art forms and artists, there's still resistance to art that's not deemed "Native" enough.

Gallery owner: Current system is failing everyday artists

The small market to give Pueblo artists a place to sell their art in downtown Santa Fe has grown into the nation's largest Indian market. Visitors and collectors attend parties, gallery openings, balls, fashion shows and museums during "Market Week," the third week in August. The market once run by non-Natives is now almost exclusively managed by Indigenous people as part of the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, or SWAIA.

Jamie Schulze, executive director of the association, is Northern Cheyenne and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate. The group's board chair, Dawn Houle, is an enrolled member of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of Montana.

Schulze said the market is working to incorporate new arts while still honoring traditions.

"We redid our standards for 2025," she said.

Even as older artists feel like they're being pushed out in favor of fashion shows, digital art and other innovations, Schulze said the association is "meeting the challenge of adding new innovations in a way that still honors traditional forms. The market itself still holds to its standards."

But for those artists who want a change, at least two other alternative markets sprang up in town to supplement the Santa Fe market, which itself features more than 1,000 artists.

For Schulze, the biggest takeaway is the joyousness she sees around town. "We see young artists entering the market for the first time that are doing well," she said.

Houle is optimistic about the future of these markets but with a pragmatic eye to ensuring their financial stability.

"You have to keep the doors open," she said in response to criticism over the association accepting sponsor dollars from fossil fuel companies. She said at least 20 tribes own oil wells.

"We're assessing who are good partners with whom we could have reciprocal relationships," she said. And "everybody is making money off the Santa Fe Indian Market," pointing to studies that said the region enjoyed a $120 million economic impact over Market Week.

While markets, galleries and museums are gradually opening up to new art forms and younger artists, this year's major market award winners came from traditional forms.

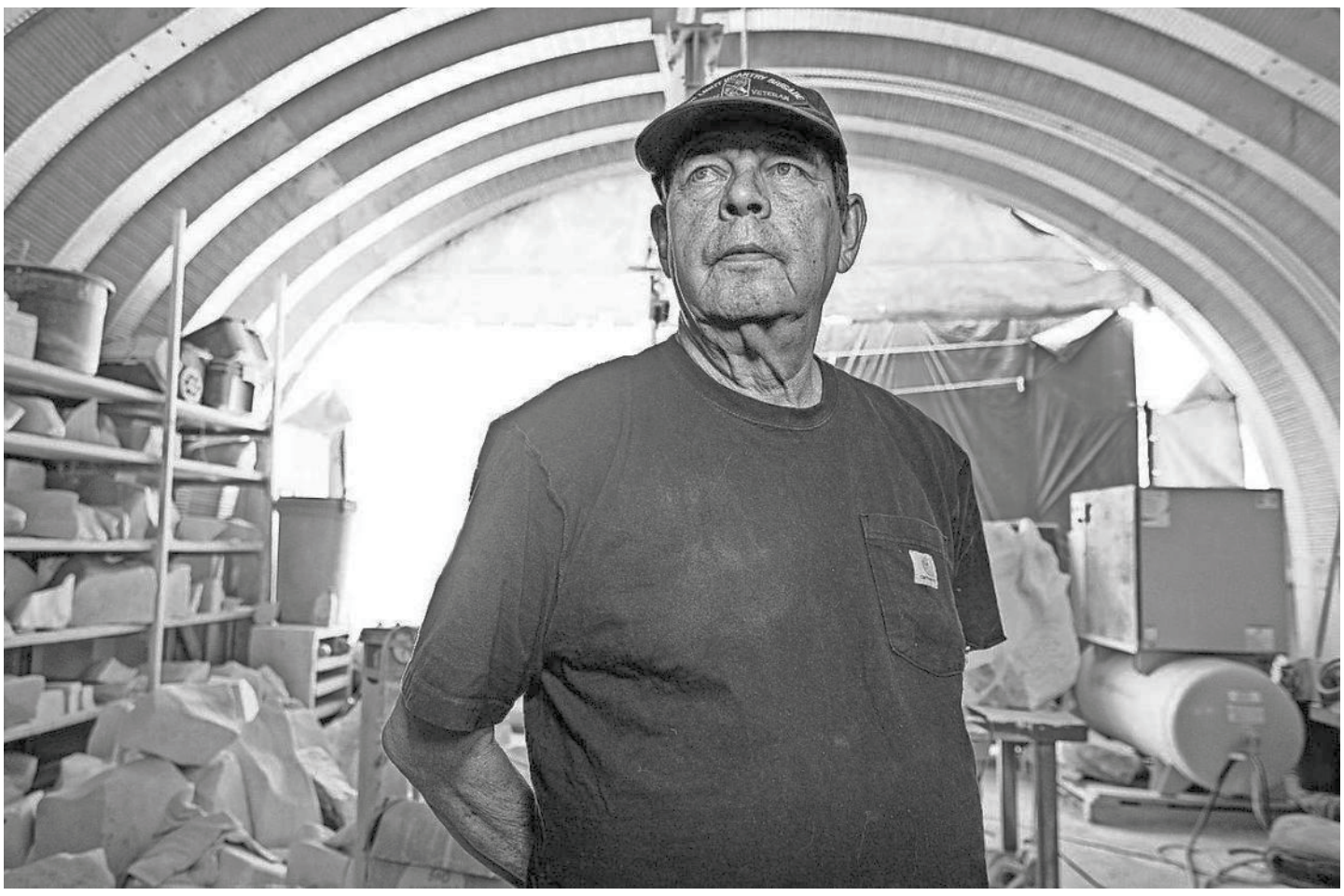
Hollis Chitto, a Mississippi Choctaw who also has Laguna and Isleta Pueblo heritage, won the Best of Show award at the Heard for a beaded bandolier bag, a form that dates back centuries. The Best of Show winner at Santa Fe was a reproduction of a weapon set carefully crafted with natural materials like knapped flint, turkey feathers, yucca cord and juniper branches commemorating the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 by Acoma Pueblo artist Dan Vallo.

But while some artists make nearly their entire incomes from the grueling process of qualifying for and entering these markets, others are left behind if their work doesn't measure up to what judges, many of whom are collectors themselves, consider to be – in the words of Bahti, the gallery owner – "knock your socks off" art.

"The current system is failing them because the current system loves the high-profile people," Bahti said. By "the system," Bahti referred to museums, galleries, Indian markets and even the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, the only federal agency charged with the economic benefits and cultural development of Native people.

He said the Indian art system likes artists who are on the "retail side" of a museum; those whose work lights up a room or who are famous and charismatic. "But it's the people who are there day to day that they need to reach out to," Bahti said. And, he said, Indian arts programs need to heed the advice of artists on the ground. "They need to understand that the answer originates where the people are."

Arizona Republic coverage of Indigenous issues at the intersection of climate, culture and commerce is supported by the Catena Foundation.



Doug Hyde, who is of Assiniboine, Nez Perce and Chippewa heritage, has been working with stone and bronze for more than six decades as one of Indian Country's master sculptors. Hyde lives in Prescott, Ariz. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

CHANGING LANES

Indigenous art masters inspired to rebel against gatekeepers

Debra Utacia Krol Arizona Republic | USA TODAY NETWORK

Yanktonai Dakota artist Oscar Howe started a rebellion against "gatekeepers" who sought to keep Native art and artists in a narrow "cultural" lane. He helped spark a sea change in Indigenous art. ● Howe, who went on to become a master of contemporary painting as well as a master Native artist, inspired others to blaze their own paths. ● Other Native artists have also become known as masters in their field, some more daring, some known both as masters and rebels. ● Painter and sculptor Fritz Scholder, a member of the La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians, frequently said he wasn't an Indian, but his color-drenched impressionist images of modern Native life defined the mid-20th century.

Chiricahua Apache sculptor and painter Allan Houser once worked as a pipefitter and art instructor to support his family. He later created the sculpture school at the Institute of American Indian Arts and went on to international acclaim.

Charles Loloma was a Hopi jeweler whose work included gold jewelry, highlighted by intricately inlaid sugilite, lapis, diamond and nontraditional stones. However, it was initially rejected by Indian markets because collectors and market managers didn't see it as "Indian" enough.

The Arizona Republic, part of the USA TODAY Network, visited with two acknowledged masters of Indigenous art.

Doug Hyde: 'The stones basically tell you what they want to be'

PRESCOTT, Ariz. — Doug Hyde meanders around the yard of his home and studio, pointing out stashes of stone. Blocks of alabaster, limestone, granite and marble lie about in the brown grass.

"The stones basically tell you what they want to be," said Hyde, who has touched, cut and polished stone for more than 60 years as one of Indian Country's master sculptors.

Peeking through the door of one outbuilding, visitors can see an array of power tools. Another building houses polishing equipment. Yet another holds maquettes, miniature versions of some of Hyde's signature pieces, and a collection of paintings and supplies.

Hyde, who is of Assiniboine, Nez Perce and Chippewa heritage, is known around the world for his ability to create life from cold stone. He estimates his work is in more than 50 museums, including the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington; the Heard Museum in Phoenix; the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma; the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis; and the Museum of the Southwest in Scottsdale, Arizona.

His stone and bronze sculptures can also be found in art centers, private collections and public spaces, including many commissions from tribes.

His commissions hold pride of place in many cities, including Phoenix, where his massive bronze Code Talker dominates a major street corner. Intertribal Greeting, also in bronze, welcomes visitors to the Heard Museum just down the street.

Yet Hyde, who grew up in Idaho and Oregon, is matter-of-fact about his accomplishments. When he was 7, his mother was sent to a tuberculosis clinic, and Hyde and his seven siblings were sent to a Catholic children's home. Over the seven years he spent there, he learned how to care for chickens and how to cook.

Molds and basket-making supplies are seen in Jeremy Frey's studio. PROVIDED BY ERIC STONER

Then he received some colored pencils and found he had a knack for art. "I did some pencil drawings of some of the girls," he said. "Most of the time they didn't like them."

Hyde went to the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1963. Then 17, he had never been away from home. Although he didn't do very well in painting, another medium called to him.

"Wow, this is a stone," Hyde said. "You can turn it, you look at it from the top and walk around the back side and it changes, and it's something somebody could touch." Ideas swirled in the boy's head. "I said that's what I really wanted to do."

Allan Houser, another master sculptor, was Hyde's instructor.

"I made deals with my teachers to get out of my English and my history classes and such so that I could go to the studio and work on stone," Hyde said.

Soon he was carving stone over the summer. Hyde estimated he made about $2.80 an hour carving pieces for the Miccosukees for their casino.

After graduating in 1966, he got a scholarship to the San Francisco Art Institute, where he was frustrated by the remedial classes.

"I'd already completed 100 sculptures, and they're only working in plaster," he said.

Hyde decided to give that up and join the Army. Three days later, he was training in Fort Lewis, Washington, preparing to go to war in Vietnam.

That's where he nearly lost his life when a grenade blew up just four feet away.

"I spent nine months in the hospital," Hyde said. "That cured me wanting to be in the military."

He went home, married and ended up working carving tombstones after being laid off from a local lumber mill. Hyde carved 10 sculptures and some paintings and got a show at the Northern Plains Museum in Browning, Montana.

"They sold everything."

Hyde's life changed again when Houser called and offered him his old teaching job in Santa Fe. Hyde changed the class up, teaching how to sculpt with power tools as he had been doing.

Over the years, Hyde said his perspective on finishing the pieces changed: "I started paying more attention to what people could see from the top or the sides of it and then figuring how to finish everything."

That evolving attention to sight lines around the sculptures plus his growing acumen as an artist led to more commissions and awards.

After his time teaching at IAIA, Hyde shared studio space with some of the greatest artists of the 20th century, including Houser, T.C. Cannon, Earl Biss and Kevin Red Star.

"It was almost like a sacred place because it was so creative during those years," he said.

Hyde thinks that synergy helped change how people thought of Indian art.

"It's a real change in philosophy; you're an Indian artist but you're also a great artist," he said. "We got invited to museums and invitational shows, and we pushed the envelope."

Commissions for monument works rolled in. Hyde has not stopped working and creating ever since. When a reporter asked where his art was headed, Hyde replied, "To my studio every morning."

But on a more serious note, he said he never thinks about where he's headed, just what he's working on that day. "Right now, my octopus lady piece is my whole world until she's done.

"I don't know how to describe it when the stone makes you happy," he said.

Jeremy Frey: Basket maker works to break down wall dividing arts

Some Indigenous artists have smashed the "Native artist" box to be known simply as an "artist."

Unlike Hyde or other acknowledged Native art masters, Passamaquoddy basket maker Jeremy Frey hasn't shown or sold his work at an Indian market for several years. That's because he's been exclusively represented since 2023 by Karma, a contemporary gallery and bookstore based in New York and Los Angeles.

Frey

The journey from his childhood home in tribal housing in remote Motahkmikuhk, or Indian Township, Maine, along the U.S.-Canadian border to a top-shelf art gallery in Manhattan was defined by culture, family and brown ash trees.

Breaking down the "wall" that divides Indigenous arts from the mainstream has long been a goal for Frey, who said he's always had his hands into something related to art.

"I used to carve. I used to sculpt. I've worked in metals and painted," he said. "I think that when you have passion, it doesn't matter what it was."

But then he moved on to the oldest art form of the four tribes of Maine known as the Wabanaki, or People of the Dawn: Basketry. He has since dedicated half his life to it.

His mother, Gal Frey, taught him the arduous technique of making a basket. Later, he apprenticed with various makers through the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, a group credited with saving the art form after it had declined to just a few artists.

His first traditional basket was completed and sold in 2002. He told a reporter in 2018 that traditionally the first basket isn't sold, but he needed the money.

Making fancy baskets in traditional shapes like ears of corn and acorns soon lost its appeal, and Frey branched out to make baskets purely as art.

> **"I used to carve. I used to sculpt. I've worked in metals and painted. I think that when you have passion, it doesn't matter what it was."**
>
> **Jeremy Frey**
> Passamaquoddy basket maker

See ART MASTERS, Page 6D

Securing tools for future

In addition to talent, artists need education, access, capital

Debra Utacia Krol Arizona Republic | USA TODAY NETWORK

IDYLLWILD, Calif. – Tain Half is a member of the Crow Tribe from Montana. Hayden Rathkamp Robbins lives in metro Phoenix and is a member of the Cherokee Nation. ● They're both 16 and juniors this year alongside six other Indigenous high schoolers at Idyllwild Arts Academy, one of the world's most acclaimed art schools. ● The campus is nestled high in California's San Jacinto Mountains, the ancestral home of the Qawishpa Cahuillangnah, or Cahuilla Band of Indians. The mile-high meadows and dappled forests are also a summer sanctuary for the other eight Cahuilla bands. ● Native artists and art have been woven into the fabric and sinew of Idyllwild and are integral to the success of the 78-year-old residential high school. Instructors have included potters like San Ildefonso Pueblo members Blue Corn and Maria Martinez, famed for her black-on-black pottery, and Luiseño painter Fritz Scholder. Cahuilla basketweaver Rose Ann Hamilton and master Navajo weavers Barbara Teller Ornelas and Lynda Pete are part of the current summer Native Arts faculty.

Shaliyah Ben, the executive director of Idyllwild's Native American Arts Center, is helping grow new Native artists as well as support their transition into productive, happy adults.

Ben, a Navajo Nation member, literally grew up at the mountaintop school. Her parents, Wendy Weston and Joe Ben, are artists in their own right, and she and sister Jennifer meandered around the pines and soaked up art every summer as their parents taught at Idyllwild. Now, Ben helps make space for more Native kids to gain the same quality education she did.

"Idyllwild gives the students a great academic education," Ben said. "Even if they don't go on to become artists, they still have a firm foundation for college or for life."

This year she's playing "aunty" to eight Indigenous students. They attend the school through a full-ride scholarship program covering tuition, food and board expenses funded by seven tribes, a tribal alliance and two private foundations. More students are on a waiting list.

Some of the students come from extremely impoverished communities, and Ben has had to pay out of pocket for backpacks, socks and underwear and even sanitary supplies. Sometimes they need a few bucks of spending cash for field trips.

"I had to go to one of my funders and ask to divert some scholarship resources for their basic needs," Ben said.

As she worked on beaded earrings in her bedroom studio, Robbins said art had always been a way to express herself, especially being one of the few Native American teens in Arcadia, an upscale Phoenix neighborhood.

Traveling to another state to attend a residential high school with many ultra-rich kids as part of Idyllwild's 300-student body had another benefit.

"There's not a lot of bullying," said Robbins, who identifies as two-spirit, a term used in the Indigenous LGBTQ community describing people with feminine and masculine characteristics. "When I was in middle school in Arcadia, I'd be harassed and one time somebody threw a glass bottle at me."

But Idyllwild is an inclusive space and even has a gender-sex alliance for students, she said.

Half is concentrating on interdisciplinary arts with an emphasis on metal, fashion and photography. "My aunt and grandpa were photographers," she said. "And I watched my mom sewing my regalia, including elk teeth."

Idyllwild provides Half with a better education than what she would have had in her tribal community high school and immerses her in the arts. "I can show my work, my culture and my eye, my perspective on things," Half said.

Bella Thorn, the daughter of art gallery owner and Native arts promoter Ruth-Ann Thorn, is also an Idyllwild student who plans on a career other than art, though she has been exposed to the art world and created her own.

Thorn says she wants to pursue social anthropology with a focus on Native Americans.

Institute of American Indian Arts is the next step in an art career

Two states away, the Institute of American Indian Arts is ready to accept Idyllwild grads.

The university produces artists and art administrators and provides a venue for cutting-edge exhibitions at its Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, said IAIA's President Robert Martin, a Cherokee Nation member. IAIA holds the world's largest collection of Indigenous contemporary art.

Once housed at the old Santa Fe Indian School, the university moved into its own campus around 2000, Martin said. And it's no longer federally operated but is independent, funded by Congress and the private sector.

"That's allowed us to flourish as an Indigenous college," he said.

IAIA built its capacity for studio and film arts, 3D printing and digital arts in addition to more traditional arts offerings. It was selected as an educational partner for the 2024 Venice Biennale U.S. pavilion featuring the first-ever solo Indigenous artist to display at the prestigious event, Mississippi Choctaw/Cherokee painter Jeffrey Gibson.

Many of the great Indigenous artists of the 20th and 21st centuries have either attended IAIA, served as instructors or both.

Nonprofits provide guidance, training and funds for Native artists

Once young Indigenous artists graduate, they learn about the realities of making a living from their work. Chiricahua Apache sculptor Allan Houser, a master artist, had to resort to a "day job" to support his family while pursuing his career.

Walter Lamar, chair of the Indian Arts and Craft Board, said he understands the plight of artists who labor to make and sell their art. His wife, National Museum of the American Indian Director Cynthia Chavez Lamar, was raised and educated because of the work of her father, San Felipe Pueblo jeweler Richard Chavez.

Lamar has heard from artists like a Navajo from the tribal community of Ganado who created pieces and drove five hours to Phoenix only to have galleries reject their work, discovering "what it feels like when you're rejected, spent gas and time, only to have to drive home with your art."

Justin Huenemann, president and CEO of the First Peoples Fund, understands this scenario well. Most of his 11 siblings in the Navajo Nation create art as their primary income.

"They spend several weeks preparing pieces and then driving to Tucson, Phoenix, Gallup to go to certain buyers," he said. "You have put in your time making and driving and paying for gas, and if you were to equate it to an hourly wage, you know you're not getting a dollar an hour, but you just need that income. It's crazy."

Jessica Stago wants to rewrite the narrative. She's the co-founder of Change Labs, an Indigenous-led initiative in Arizona that provides support and training for entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.

"A major obstacle for entrepreneurs to open businesses on the rez is access to capital," Stago said. "And we don't talk enough about the reasons why."

Lenders are reluctant to extend credit to tribal business owners, said Stago, a member of the Navajo Nation, citing their reliance on what's called the "5Cs of credit" – character, capacity, capital, collateral and conditions.

Tribal members can have trouble getting financing when a bank asks for collateral like real estate, as most tribal lands are held in trust by the federal government and cannot be sold or foreclosed. Also, banks are few on large tribal reservations, and many do not have the expertise to work with tribes and their unique conditions.

Indigenous artists must carefully manage their cash since many of them make most of their yearly income from two or three markets. But that's not enough for the ordinary bank, which also requires compliance with debt-to-income ratios and capital investments like down payments.

Just finding enough spare cash to build a robust website can be too high a wall for artists

See FUTURE, Page 6D

Idyllwild Arts Academy junior Tain Half, 16, is studying interdisciplinary arts with a focus on metal, fashion and photography. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

"A major obstacle for entrepreneurs to open businesses on the rez is access to capital. And we don't talk enough about the reasons why."

Jessica Stago
Co-founder of Change Labs

Robert Martin, president of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, N.M., says the IAIA flourishes as an Indigenous college because it's no longer federally operated. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

Idyllwild Arts Academy junior Hayden Rathkamp Robbins, 16, shows her beadwork. Robbins say art has always been a way for her to express herself. JOEL ANGEL JUAREZ/USA TODAY NETWORK

Art masters

Continued from Page 4D

That drive to self-improvement and new directions as an artist led to opportunities such as a fellowship with United States Artists. The grant enabled Frey to devote time to refining, redefining and innovating an ancient craft.

It also helped him and his wife, Ganessa, a Penobscot basketmaker, to support their three kids while building his career.

In 2011, Frey was the first-ever basket artist, and only the second Native artist, to win the two most prestigious competitions – the Heard Indian Fair and Market and the Santa Fe Indian Market – in the same year.

He won a second Best of Show award from the Heard Indian Fair in 2015.

Then karma – or rather, Karma – found Frey.

"When I first encountered Jeremy's work at the 2022 New England Triennial, I knew I was seeing something special," said Karma owner Brendan Dugan. "I kept circling back to his baskets until it became clear that I had to meet the artist who created them."

Karma has represented Frey ever since.

Wabanaki basket-making isn't for wimps. It's a long, arduous process.

First, Frey heads out to the woods to locate a brown ash tree. It must be the right size with a straight trunk and free of disease. He cuts the tree, brings the trunk back home to his studio just north of Bangor, removes the bark and then pounds the rings loose with the flat of an axe.

He then carefully slices the rings into long, thin strips called splints. The splints can be stored and curled up on shelves until he's ready to create the final steps.

Frey then takes a specially made tool known as a gauge. These hardwood tools are embedded with razor-sharp metal blades of different widths. Some gauges have been handed down over generations, while others are recently made. Holding one end of the splint, Frey painstakingly runs the gauge down the length of it, slicing strips as small as one-thirty-second of an inch wide. He can then dye the strips to a desired color or leave them as naturally light wood.

After all this labor, Frey can finally start the basket. He uses a variety of hardwood forms to weave the floor and walls of a basket, and sweetgrass, another traditional Wabanaki material, and cedar bark for accents.

Doug Hyde stands outside his home in Prescott, Ariz., surrounded by rock materials and a single sculpture. MEGAN MENDOZA/USA TODAY NETWORK

Observer by Jeremy Frey, 2022. Made from ash, sweetgrass, porcupine quill on birch bark and dye.
PROVIDED BY ERIC STONER

But that's where he branches away from "craft" and moves toward "art." He bends the splints into razor-sharp points, uses several colors to define the weaving and creates new shapes like vases and double-wall basketry using contrastingly dyed splints. He designs for lines that flow, that are perfect.

Frey also adorns some of his baskets with designs made with porcupine quills. Determined to best himself with each creation, Frey worked to hone his art – and his gauges.

"I didn't think I'd be making contemporary art," he said. But pushing himself also drove him to master old techniques while creating new forms. "Each basket leads to the next basket."

Frey thought it would be 20 years before he would be the subject of a one-man exhibit, and "all of a sudden it was 20 years later, and then I was offered a solo show."

That was at the Portland Museum of Art. The exhibit "Woven" ran from May through September and will travel to Chicago next. Like other firsts in Frey's career, it's also the first time a Maine Indian artist was so honored.

Frey continued his innovative streak. "I have woven sculpture, I have a video, I have my prints in there," he said. "I'm doing something new but having it make sense to my audience."

There's another benefit to gallery representation: Karma cocoons Frey from mundane tasks like sales, public relations or making travel arrangements.

"I can just make art," he said.

He has time to sit in his studio and think about innovations and new ways to weave art from the humble brown ash tree. "It's this moment of growth."

Although he's glad to be freed from the minutiae surrounding the business end of art, Frey misses the Indian market scene. "I want to go back someday and be a judge just to pay back," he said. "But now I have to get through this really busy time because everything's happening all at once."

One factor may limit what he's able to accomplish: the emerald ash borer. This tiny iridescent green insect, accidentally imported from Asia on pallets, is deadly to ash trees and will likely wipe out more than a billion of them before it's done reproducing itself across the Northeast.

Frey has been building up a supply of ash in anticipation of the day it disappears and, like other basketmakers, explores new materials.

The video "Ash," created for the "Woven" exhibit, shows the toll exacted from losing ash trees, a central point in the Maine Indian cultures including the Passamaquoddy. After Frey shows the monthslong process of making one of his exquisite baskets, he sets it ablaze, signifying the damage the ash borer will do.

Just as his mom and other relatives taught him, Frey is teaching the next generation of Wabanaki basketmakers. His apprentice, Penobscot/Cherokee Caleb Hoffman, won the Best of Basketry award at the 2024 Santa Fe Indian Market.

And the accolades continue. The deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts, awarded Frey the 25th Rappaport Prize, the first-ever for an Indigenous artist. In addition to a grant, Frey was set to deliver a lecture at the museum in October.

But for all the acclaim, awards and international attention, Frey said, "I just feel blessed and honored and humbled to be recognized for all the hard work I've done.

"I don't know that one person really deserves this, but if they're going to do this, it might as well be me."

Arizona Republic coverage of Indigenous issues at the intersection of climate, culture and commerce is supported by the Catena Foundation.

Future

Continued from Page 5D

who must make their money stretch between shows. "Significant investment and cash flow are issues," Stago said.

And, she said, the business model for Native artists has always been based on traders acting as middlemen, which she called the "gatekeeping mode of non-Indian dealers and their protectionist model."

That's where organizations like Change Labs come in to support more Indigenous artists. That includes acting as their own dealers and marketing directly to buyers.

The organization offers opportunities for Navajos and Hopis to open or build businesses. Those include kinship lending, which evaluates microloan borrowers on Indigenous kinship or relationships instead of mainstream risk assessment.

Artists who are affected by COVID-19 can apply for an emergency relief grant. Financial education and training, executive coaching, mentorship, professional photography and brand development, as well as a coworking space are also available.

In August, Change Labs launched its biggest program yet: a small business credit initiative program for Navajo business owners, artists and entrepreneurs. The loan program is part of the U.S. Treasury's State Small Business Credit Initiative. Over the next three years, Change Labs and its partners will hand out $13.3 million in business loans.

Other arts organizations have a broader reach. The First Peoples Fund invests in artists across the nation through monetary support and entrepreneur training. Huenemann said he sees his mission as supporting artists and culture bearers to move past "survive" to "thrive."

First Peoples Fund offers yearlong fellowships to support artists and culture bearers with cash grants to support their work and build sustainable businesses. The organization also holds shorter training sessions, supports artists in need of an extra boost or during emergencies, and recognizes up to six artists and culture bearers annually with its premier Community Spirit Award, which comes with a $50,000 grant to support their efforts to teach art and tradition.

"Artists need access to capital and credit," said Huenmann, a Navajo citizen. But more than that, they need access to the larger economic market, supplies, creative spaces, networking and training to create an ecosystem that is often controlled by non-Natives whose interest is in retaining that control.

"They know that if they control the narrative and the dollars, they control the artists," Huenemann said. "The longtime question is, 'Who really controls the market, the buyer or the artist?'"

Young artists are dabbling in 3D and digital, genres that collectors reject. "The collectors say, 'Wait, that doesn't look like that pottery I'm looking for,'" he said.

That is one of First Peoples Fund's primary drivers, Huenemann said: "How can we support artists to thrive and live, to realize a living wage so that they can take care of themselves and their family, and contribute to a bigger community?"

Supporting Native artist businesses to create and sell more of their designs supports a sustainable tribal economy, Stago said.

"When we support and help small business owners, they'll spend more of their money to support another Native American business," she said. "They'll support coffee shops, bakeries and eateries."

That will create a market within the community for more businesses like tire shops, beauty salons and other service companies that will hire people.

"The more people working and spending money in the community, the more money stays in that community," she said.

Can this museum be decolonized?

Museums and galleries continue to loom large as promoters and gatekeepers in Indigenous arts. While some experts see change as opening up new markets and avenues for Native contemporary artists, others aren't so sure.

John Haworth is bullish on the emergence of Native art as a world-class genre. Haworth, who helped create and nurture the National Museum of the American Indian, recalled the time when Native contemporary artists found it hard to be recognized by galleries or mainstream museums.

But times are changing.

"A lot of (the change) is what I call field building," said Haworth, a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

The careers of prominent Native art curators like Kathleen Ash-Milby, a Navajo who co-organized Gibson's groundbreaking exhibit in Venice in 2024 for the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, and fellow Navajo Nation member Andrea Hanley, vice president of programs for the Native Arts and Crafts Foundation, show the talent Indigenous art professionals possess.

Grassroots-level arts also play an important role in the genre, Haworth said.

He credited artists like Jaune Quick-to-See Smith for busting the perceptions of Native art as stuck in the past to garner acclaim in venues like the National Gallery of Art, where she curated a contemporary exhibit in 2023.

But the reality in mainstream museums is far different than in Native-directed or tribal museums, according to a Native art expert.

Christopher Newell, a member of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, is the former director of the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, Maine. Newell, who, like basketmaker Jeremy Frey, also grew up in Motahkmikuhk or Indian Township, said Native people are very underrepresented in the art museum world.

Indigenous people make up just under 0.5% of the entire workforce in art museums, according to the Mellon Foundation's 2022 Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey.

Most of those are entry-level staff. The survey found just five conservators come from American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander communities.

Newell said the solution is simple: "Hire more Native people in positions of intellectual authority." That means not just advanced degrees in art history but the equivalent standing in traditional knowledge.

Indigenizing histories also means recasting how Native art histories are told.

Newell comes by his activism through heredity. His father was at Harvard where, as Newell related it, "he raised Cain at the Peabody Museum in the 1970s." Despite his father's hard work, the Peabody did not repatriate the remains of the Wabanaki, or the four tribes of Maine, for another 50 years.

Newell also had something to say about how museums support themselves.

"I didn't grow up in a world where art was created to be sold but to preserve a way of life," Newell said. "The makers were selling their baskets for $30 and $40 back then. It was really pennies, but they didn't see a reason to raise the prices because what they were making was from the earth and they didn't want to take more than they needed."

After the Maine Indian Basketmaker Alliance educated basketmakers on the importance of appropriate pricing, he noticed that buyers from the Abbe would come to basket markets and wait until the end of the day to start scooping up unsold work at bargain prices to mark up in their shop.

"That was hard for the artists to have to discount their work, but they needed the money," Newell said.

He halted that practice, requiring buyers to purchase Wabanaki art at the marked price. They could then charge higher prices in the shop.

He now runs the Akomawt Educational Initiative where he and his colleagues train educators and museum staff about Indigenous education topics.

Mark Bahti, the gallery owner, thinks the Indian market concept could also benefit from a redo. He said that, like museum shops, the markets don't benefit the artists as much as in past years.

But no matter how or if the markets improve for Native artists or if they take their businesses into their own hands, both new technologies and traditional ways of making art will ensure that Native arts spark cultural continuation.

"There's a genuine excitement that the technology, whatever iteration it is in the future, is going to free people from the drudgery," said Laguna Pueblo artist Pat Pruitt, who works with untraditional metals and uses modern computer-aided technology and cutting-edge machining equipment. "They won't be restricted in how they design and make things."

"I believe that the traditional arts are a language in and of themselves," Lenape artist and curator Joe Baker said. "They tell others who we are."

He said these traditional arts define each Indigenous culture and spring from the place, home and heart of that community.

"So if we are to continue our culture, which we must, we also must continue the traditional arts."

Arizona Republic coverage of Indigenous issues at the intersection of climate, culture and commerce is supported by the Catena Foundation.

NATION&WORLD EXTRA

INSIDE

Divided Supreme Court won't halt sentencing of Trump. 6NN

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER

A life that rose above politics

Remembered at DC, Georgia funerals

Jeff Mason, Katharine Jackson and Bo Erickson
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Jimmy Carter, the late U.S. president who served only one term in office and was widely admired for his humanitarian work after leaving the White House, was remembered during his state funeral on Thursday as a man who put honesty and kindness above partisan politics.

Hundreds of mourners, including President Joe Biden and the four living former U.S. presidents, filed into the Washington National Cathedral, where a military guard deposited Carter's flag-draped coffin at the start of a roughly two-hour service that featured tributes to Carter's long life.

Fellow Democrat Biden eulogized the 39th president, who died on Dec. 29 at the age of 100, saying Carter's life was the "story of a man who never let the tides of politics divert him from his mission to serve and shape the world."

"The man had character," Biden said.

Tens of thousands of Americans over the past two days filed through the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol to pay their respects to Carter, who was president from 1977 to 1981 and was burdened by an ailing economy and the Iran hostage crisis. Many mourners hailed him as an example of decency and humility for today's breed of highly partisan politicians.

Reed Elliott, 14, wears a flag suit and a Jimmy Carter pin while waiting for the hearse carrying Carter's casket in Plains, Ga., on Thursday. SAM WOLFE/REUTERS

"I never perceived a difference between his public face and his private one. He was the same person no matter who he was with or where he was, and for me, that's the definition of integrity. That honesty was matched by love."

Jason Carter
Former President Jimmy Carter's grandson

Republican President-elect Donald Trump, who will return to office on Jan. 20, sat a row behind Biden in the cathedral. Carter supported Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 election.

As Trump gears up to crack down on illegal immigration and stirs controversy with U.S. friends or allies like Canada, Panama and Denmark, Biden underlined Carter's virtues of compassion and respect.

"Jimmy Carter's friendship taught me ... that strength of character is more than title or the power we hold. It's the strength to understand that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect," Biden said.

"It's about asking ourselves ... What are the values that animate our spirit? Do we operate from fear or hope, ego or generosity? Do we show grace? Do we keep the faith when it's most tested?"

Ted Mondale, the son of Walter Mondale, who served as vice president under Carter, read a eulogy from his deceased father that also provided a contrast of sorts with the current era of misinformation, saying, "We told the truth. We obeyed the law."

See CARTER, Page 7NN

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

Blazes devour more homes

Fierce winds start to ease in Los Angeles area

Jorge Garcia and Rollo Ross
REUTERS

LOS ANGELES – Two massive wildfires menacing Los Angeles from the east and west were still burning uncontained on Thursday, but a brief respite from the fierce winds that have fanned the flames for two days allowed crews to slow their explosive spread.

The Palisades Fire between Santa Monica and Malibu on the city's western flank and the Eaton Fire in the east near Pasadena already rank as the most destructive in Los Angeles history, consuming nearly 31,000 acres – or some 48 square miles – turning entire neighborhoods to ash.

At least seven people have been killed, thousands of homes and businesses have been incinerated and

See BLAZES, Page 5NN

Chris and Christina Larson survey the ruins of their business, the Rancho Bar, which was destroyed by the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif., on Thursday.
ZOE MEYERS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

TOP: The sun rises over the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of west Los Angeles on Thursday.
MARIA ALEJANDRA CARDONA/REUTERS

Era of cheap homeowners insurance is likely over

Pacific Palisades was more affordable with premiums

Andy Sullivan
REUTERS

The Pacific Palisades area ravaged by wildfires in Los Angeles is one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the U.S., home to Hollywood A-listers and multimillion-dollar mansions.

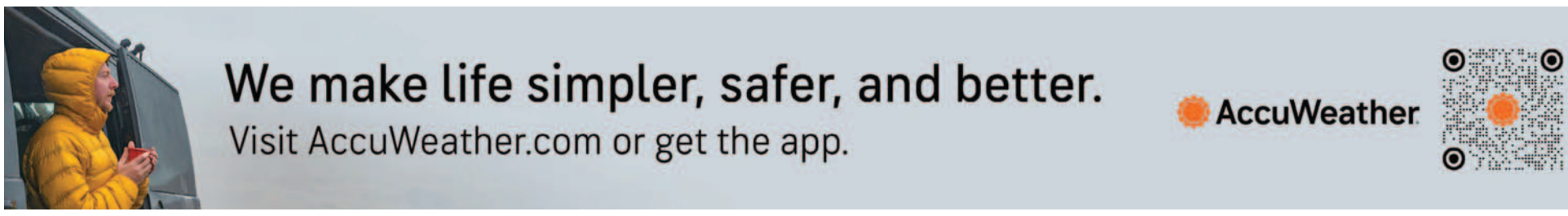
And ahead of this week's disaster, its insurance costs were among the most affordable in the country, according to a Reuters analysis of insurance and real estate industry data. That may be about to change.

The scale of losses anticipated in the wildfires now ablaze in Los Angeles, as well as regulatory changes enacted late last year, could spell an end to relatively cheap homeowners' insurance in areas like the Palisades that are at elevated risk for wildfires, four analysts told Reuters.

"One sees relatively low premiums in high-risk markets in California, but that might be starting to change," said Philip Mulder, a University of Wisconsin professor who studies the industry.

Measured against home values, insurance costs are cheaper in the Palisades than in 97% of U.S. postal codes, according to a Reuters analysis of a national database of price data collected by Mulder and University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School professor Ben-

See INSURANCE, Page 5NN

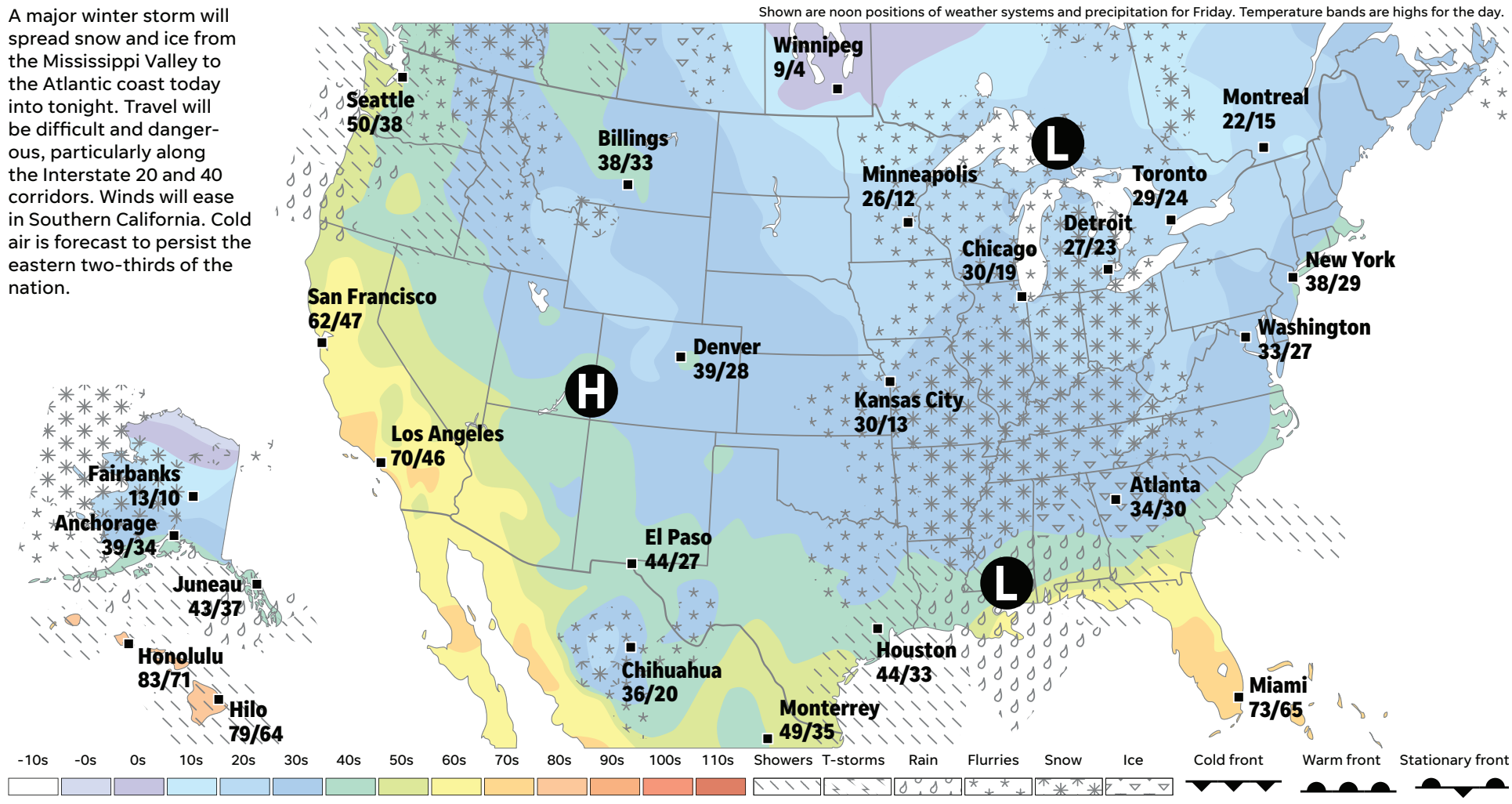


NATIONAL SUMMARY

A major winter storm will spread snow and ice from the Mississippi Valley to the Atlantic coast today into tonight. Travel will be difficult and dangerous, particularly along the Interstate 20 and 40 corridors. Winds will ease in Southern California. Cold air is forecast to persist the eastern two-thirds of the nation.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation for Friday. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



THURSDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)

High:	**80** at Oxnard, CA
Low:	**-17** at Crested Butte, CO
Precip:	**1.02”** at Dallas, TX

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)

High:	**113** at Cloncurry, Australia
Low:	**-51** at Delyankir, Russia
Precip:	**5.04”** at Masbate City, Philippines

TODAY IN HISTORY

The heaviest snowstorm ever to affect the Southeast coast of the United States struck on Jan. 10, 1800. Along the St. Mary’s River in northern Florida, 5 inches of snow fell. The port of Charleston, S.C., received 10 inches.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: On average, when in the coldest period for the United States?

A: The latter part of January.

NATIONAL CITIES FRIDAY

● Denotes possible travel delays

	High/low/W	Air Quality
Aberdeen, SD	26/16/s	45
Abilene, TX	39/27/c	49
● Accomac, VA	33/27/pc	49
● Adrian, MI	26/22/sn	50
● Akron, OH	24/20/sf	63
Alamogordo, NM	42/15/s	37
● Alexandria, VA	32/25/pc	57
● Alliance, OH	25/20/sf	65
Amarillo, TX	36/19/pc	48
● Ames, IA	29/15/sf	40
● Anderson, SC	33/30/sn	44
Appleton, WI	29/15/sn	45
● Asheville, NC	32/28/sn	46
● Ashland, OH	25/20/sn	62
● Athens, GA	34/30/i	44
● Augusta, GA	37/33/i	41
Austin, TX	44/25/pc	40
Bartlesville, OK	34/16/sn	36
● Battle Creek, MI	27/23/sn	53
● Bedford, IN	27/23/sn	99
Binghamton, NY	23/18/c	50
● Bluffton, SC	47/42/r	38
Bremerton, WA	50/36/r	42
Brockton, MA	40/27/s	49
Brownwood, TX	41/20/c	47
Burlington, IA	30/17/sn	48
● Burlington, NC	36/25/sf	50
Burlington, VT	26/17/pc	46
● Cambridge, OH	27/21/c	58
Camdenton, MO	32/19/sn	44
Canandaigua, NY	27/21/c	52
● Canton, OH	24/20/sf	63
Carlsbad, NM	41/24/pc	44
● Chambersburg, PA	31/22/pc	66
Cherry Hill, NJ	35/27/s	54
● Cincinnati, OH	27/22/sn	96
● Clarksville, TN	32/28/sn	51
● Coldwater, MI	26/22/sn	55
● Columbus, OH	26/22/sn	78
Corning, NY	29/20/c	52
Corpus Christi, TX	53/36/sh	35
Daytona Beach, FL	67/58/s	45
Deming, NM	43/17/s	40
● DeRidder, LA	43/29/r	19
Des Moines, IA	28/17/sf	36
● Detroit, MI	27/23/sn	51
Devils Lake, ND	15/12/c	37
Dover, NH	34/21/pc	44
El Paso, TX	44/27/s	51
Elmira, NY	28/20/c	51
● Erie, PA	26/22/c	52
Eugene, OR	53/38/r	47
● Evansville, IN	30/25/sn	97
Fall River, MA	41/27/s	50
Farmington, NM	40/16/s	51
● Fayetteville, NC	37/31/i	51
Fond du Lac, WI	29/16/sn	53
Fort Myers, FL	75/63/s	53
Fort Smith, AR	37/17/sn	39
Framingham, MA	40/25/pc	48
Freeport, IL	30/18/sn	57
● Fremont, OH	27/22/sn	56
Fort Collins, CO	37/24/c	48
● Gadsden, AL	35/30/i	42
● Gainesville, FL	67/55/pc	50
Galesburg, IL	29/16/sn	49
● Gastonia, NC	34/25/sn	50
Glen Rose, TX	39/24/c	45
● Gonzales, LA	55/34/r	23
● Great Falls, MT	44/28/c	38
Green Bay, WI	29/16/sn	42
● Greenville, SC	33/28/sn	49
Hackensack, NJ	39/28/s	53
● Hagerstown, MD	31/23/pc	65
● Hattiesburg, MS	45/34/r	23
● Henderson, KY	29/25/sn	99
● Hendersonville, NC	31/26/sn	48
Herkimer, NY	24/17/pc	51
● Hillsdale, MI	25/21/sn	54
● Holland, MI	31/26/sn	48
Hornell, NY	28/20/c	52
● Houma, LA	62/35/r	27
● Howell, MI	26/22/sn	48
Hutchinson, KS	30/12/sf	42
Hyannis, MA	38/27/s	43
● Indianapolis, IN	26/21/sn	96
Iowa City, IA	31/16/sn	43
Ithaca, NY	24/18/c	51
● Jackson, MS	40/34/r	24
● Jackson, TN	34/26/sn	33
Jacksonville, FL	62/54/c	53
● Jacksonville, NC	40/33/r	51
● Kent, OH	25/21/c	62
Kewanee, IL	30/17/sn	54
● Keyser, WV	32/21/pc	57
● Kinston, NC	40/31/pc	51
● Knoxville, TN	31/29/sn	42
● Lafayette, IN	28/19/sn	79
● Lafayette, LA	48/35/r	22
Lakeland, FL	73/60/s	42
● Lansing, MI	26/21/sn	48
Las Cruces, NM	41/20/s	38
Lebanon, PA	32/24/pc	52
● Leesburg, FL	70/60/s	43
Levittown, PA	36/27/s	53
Lincoln, IL	33/19/sn	60
● Louisville, KY	31/26/sn	95
Lubbock, TX	40/25/pc	46
Manitowoc, WI	29/17/sn	53
● Mansfield, OH	24/20/sn	63
● Marshall, NC	33/27/sn	40
Marshfield, WI	28/11/sn	57
● Massillon, OH	25/21/sf	64
● McLean, VA	31/23/pc	59
Melbourne, FL	69/59/s	41
● Memphis, TN	34/25/sn	40
Middletown, NY	33/22/pc	49
Milford, MA	40/25/s	48
Milwaukee, WI	30/19/sn	52
● Monroe, MI	27/22/sn	55
Monroe, LA	41/31/r	22
● Montgomery, AL	42/33/r	31
● Muncie, IN	26/21/sn	90
● Murfreesboro, TN	33/28/sn	50
Naples, FL	74/64/s	51
● Nashville, TN	34/30/sn	51
Neptune, NJ	39/28/s	53
New Bedford, MA	41/24/s	43
● New Bern, NC	41/33/pc	50
● New Philadelphia, OH	26/21/sf	64
● Newark, OH	26/21/sn	67
Newton, NJ	34/24/pc	51
New York, NY	38/29/s	56
Norwich, CT	38/26/s	44
● Ocala, FL	70/57/pc	48
Oklahoma City, OK	33/19/c	51
● Opelousas, LA	40/31/r	26
Oshkosh, WI	28/14/sn	48
Palm Beach, FL	72/65/pc	38
Palm Springs, CA	72/46/s	123
● Panama City, FL	63/41/r	47
Pekin, IL	33/19/sn	60
● Pensacola, FL	63/37/r	42
Peoria, IL	32/18/sn	54
● Petersburg, VA	36/28/pc	52
Phoenix, AZ	63/40/s	109
● Port Huron, MI	27/22/sn	46
Portsmouth, NH	36/21/pc	32
Poughkeepsie, NY	37/24/pc	41
Providence, RI	39/26/s	50
Pueblo, CO	40/21/s	50
Quincy, MA	40/28/s	52
Redding, CA	59/44/s	42
Reno, NV	57/27/pc	66
● Ravenna, OH	25/20/sf	62
● Richmond, IN	24/21/sn	93
Rochester, NY	28/22/c	51
Rockford, IL	30/18/sn	48
Ruidoso, NM	34/21/s	45
Salem, OR	53/40/r	32
Salina, KS	30/14/sf	45
Salinas, CA	66/40/s	65
● Salisbury, MD	33/26/pc	50
San Angelo, TX	43/24/pc	39
● Sarasota, FL	72/64/s	41
● Savannah, GA	48/44/c	43
Sheboygan, WI	29/17/sn	57
● Shelby, NC	32/24/sn	50
Sherman, TX	34/20/c	46
● Shreveport, LA	40/26/c	25
Silver City, NM	38/17/s	41
Sioux Falls, SD	26/17/pc	49
● Somerset, PA	25/19/c	62
Somerville, NJ	38/27/s	52
● South Bend, IN	29/24/sn	50
● Spartanburg, SC	34/26/sn	50
Springfield, IL	32/18/sn	56
Springfield, MO	31/20/sn	36
● St. Augustine, FL	63/57/c	45
St. Cloud, MN	23/8/sf	51
St. George, UT	49/30/s	51
● Staunton, VA	31/19/c	51
Stevens Point, WI	29/12/sn	55
Stockton, CA	65/42/s	78
Stroudsburg, PA	34/23/pc	51
Stuart, FL	72/61/s	44
● Sturgis, MI	26/23/sn	52
● Tallahassee, FL	61/43/c	55
Thibodaux, LA	61/34/r	25
Topeka, KS	31/13/sf	43
● Tuscaloosa, AL	39/32/i	32
Utica, NY	23/15/pc	50
Ventura, CA	66/46/pc	79
Victorville, CA	62/32/s	52
Vineland, NJ	35/26/s	52
Visalia, CA	64/35/s	64
● Washington, DC	33/27/pc	58
Watertown, SD	21/13/s	50
Wausau, WI	27/10/sn	47
● Waynesboro, PA	30/21/pc	66
White Plains, NY	38/27/s	49
Wichita Falls, TX	39/22/c	50
Wilmington, DE	35/27/s	54
● Wilmington, NC	42/33/r	52
Wisconsin Rapids, WI	30/12/sn	58
● Wooster, OH	25/21/sn	58
Worcester, MA	36/23/s	44
● York, PA	32/23/pc	59

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Friday High/low/W	Saturday High/low/W
Acapulco	86/72/pc	82/70/sh
Addis Ababa	75/53/pc	76/52/s
Algiers	70/46/s	69/53/pc
Amman	60/46/pc	56/46/s
Amsterdam	41/28/pc	41/31/pc
Ankara	51/27/pc	52/34/pc
Asuncion	99/75/s	97/74/pc
Athens	64/48/pc	64/51/pc
Auckland	76/59/s	74/59/s
Baghdad	69/44/pc	61/45/sh
Bangkok	89/68/pc	84/63/s
Beijing	39/13/pc	35/18/pc
● Beirut	69/56/pc	66/56/pc
Belgrade	49/29/r	41/26/s
● Berlin	35/29/sn	33/27/pc
● Bogota	69/45/c	70/42/sh
Brussels	35/24/s	35/28/c
● Bucharest	56/32/pc	41/27/s
Budapest	42/28/pc	39/29/s
Buenos Aires	83/70/pc	82/71/s
Cairo	69/55/s	69/55/pc
● Cape Town	77/62/s	78/65/s
Caracas	89/75/pc	91/75/s
Casablanca	71/48/s	70/51/pc
Colombo	89/77/r	86/75/t
● Copenhagen	35/29/c	35/30/s
Damascus	59/38/s	60/38/s
● Dublin	40/38/c	45/35/c
● Geneva	41/36/sh	40/29/pc
Guatemala City	79/58/s	78/59/s
Hanoi	68/56/c	66/46/pc
Harare	75/64/t	80/63/t
Havana	79/62/s	83/64/pc
● Helsinki	35/28/sn	30/20/sn
Hong Kong	65/50/pc	64/52/pc
Jakarta	87/78/t	87/77/sh
● Jerusalem	60/46/pc	55/47/r
● Johannesburg	77/61/c	74/61/t
Kabul	37/18/pc	39/18/s
Khartoum	86/61/s	82/57/pc
● Kyiv	45/31/sh	36/28/pc
Kingston	87/74/c	88/76/s
● La Paz	53/42/r	54/42/r
Lagos	91/73/pc	92/74/pc
Lima	77/67/pc	77/67/c
● Lisbon	63/57/c	66/55/c
London	35/27/pc	35/30/pc
● Madrid	57/46/c	63/37/pc
Manila	86/77/c	83/76/sh
Mexico City	70/51/pc	64/51/pc
Milan	50/32/c	47/30/pc
Mombasa	90/76/t	91/76/c
● Montevideo	80/63/pc	78/62/s
Montreal	22/15/pc	24/14/sf
Moscow	38/37/sn	41/30/r
Nairobi	78/61/t	80/61/t
New Delhi	65/46/pc	64/52/sh
Panama City	89/72/sh	90/72/c
Paris	39/29/sh	38/29/c
Port-au-Prince	90/63/pc	89/63/s
Rio de Janeiro	80/71/pc	80/71/pc
Riyadh	68/48/pc	73/52/pc
Rome	62/48/pc	59/44/c
San Jose	82/65/c	83/65/pc
San Salvador	86/62/s	87/64/s
Santiago	92/59/s	94/59/s
Sao Paulo	77/62/t	79/62/pc
Sarajevo	46/28/r	35/26/pc
Shanghai	43/29/s	45/31/pc
● Singapore	81/74/t	81/75/t
● Stockholm	31/24/c	30/21/pc
● Sydney	78/71/t	80/70/t
Taipei	55/52/c	57/52/c
Tegucigalpa	83/57/pc	83/61/s
Tehran	56/40/s	55/41/s
Tokyo	50/37/s	54/38/s
● Toronto	29/24/c	32/23/c
Tunis	68/52/s	69/53/s
● Vancouver	47/38/sh	44/37/pc
Vienna	41/30/s	38/30/pc
● Warsaw	37/29/c	33/30/c
Yerevan	38/21/pc	38/25/pc
Zagreb	40/25/r	41/22/s
Zurich	38/28/sn	36/26/pc

● Denotes possible travel delays Friday

Weather(W): **s**-sunny, **pc**-partly cloudy, **c**-cloudy, **sh**-showers, **t**-thunderstorms, **r**-rain, **sf**-snow flurries, **sn**-snow, **i**-ice.

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NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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SUDAN

'Unmitigated brutality'

Sudan's Rapid Support Forces dismissed new U.S. sanctions against its leader this week over allegations that the paramilitary group and its allied militias committed genocide during the country's ongoing civil war, Reuters reported.

On Tuesday, Washington imposed sanctions on RSF leader Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, barring him and his family from entering the United States and freezing their assets. Seven RSF-linked companies in the United Arab Emirates and an individual involved in weapons procurement were also sanctioned.

The move comes after U.S. officials determined that the RSF and its allies had committed genocide and war crimes, including systematic killings, sexual violence and ethnic cleansing, particularly in the western region of Darfur. In a statement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the conflict as "unmitigated brutality," claiming that the paramilitary group deliberately targeted men, boys and women from non-Arab ethnic groups, as well as prevented civilians from accessing lifesaving supplies.

But RSF representatives rejected the allegations and called the measures "wrong." They accused Washington of "rewarding those who started the war by punishing General Hemedti."

Sudan's war began in April 2023 following a power struggle between Hemedti and Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, head of the Sudanese Armed Forces. The ongoing fighting has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and a humanitarian crisis. More than 30 million people are in need of assistance and famine has been declared in several regions, according to Blinken.

Efforts by the U.S. and international partners to broker peace have failed.

ITALY

Health decree

The small village of Belcastro in Italy has banned its residents from becoming seriously ill, amid a health care crisis in the southern region of Calabria, the BBC reported.

A decree from the village's Mayor Antonio Torchia ordered residents "to avoid contracting any illness that may require emergency medical assistance." It also instructs villagers "not to engage in behaviors that may be harmful and to avoid domestic accidents," and "not to leave the house too often, travel or practice sports, and to (instead) rest for the majority of the time."

Torchia said the decree was "obviously a humorous provocation" to garner attention to the inadequate health care access.

It is not clear if the measures will be enforced or how.

Still, the mayor noted that the decree seemed to have more effect than the urgent notices he sent to regional authorities to highlight the deficiencies of Calabria's local health care system.

Around half of Belcastro's 1,200 residents are over the age of 65, and the nearest emergency department is more than 28 miles away.

The mayor added that the on-call doctor surgery in the small village is only open sporadically, making it hard to access emergency care.

One Belcastro resident praised Torchia's move, saying: "He has used a provocative decree to attract attention to a serious problem."

Political mismanagement and Mafia interference have decimated the health care system in this poor and sparsely populated region of Italy. Hospitals are plagued with vast amounts of debt, leading their facilities to lack medical personnel and beds. Patients also face never-ending waitlists for care.

Eighteen of the region's hospitals have closed since 2009. One in 5 Calabrian residents seek medical care outside of the province due to shortages, according to Euronews.

In 2022, Cuba pledged to send 497 doctors to Calabria over three years to work in various medical facilities. Roberto Occhiuto, the regional governor, said that these doctors had "saved" Calabria's hospitals.

Disgruntled patients and relatives have also been taking out their anger on hospital staff. In September, the Italian army was deployed to a Calabrian hospital following a string of violent attacks on health care workers, the Associated Press noted.

DISCOVERIES

Gaining speed

Lucy, the iconic 3.2 million-year-old *Australopithecus afarensis*, may have walked upright, but she wasn't breaking any speed records.

A recent study used advanced simulations to uncover how the ancient hominin ran, revealing fascinating insights into the evolutionary tweaks that have made humans exceptional runners, Phys.org reported.

Scientists combined Lucy's skeletal structure with modern ape-like muscle features in a simulator and discovered that she was a bit of a slowpoke – while she could run on two legs, her top speed was just 11 mph.

For comparison, recreational runners can run up to around 13 mph, while Olympic gold medalist Usain Bolt's record-breaking sprints clock in at over 27 mph.

The team explained that part of the problem is in her anatomy.

Unlike modern humans, Lucy lacked a long, spring-like Achilles tendon and powerful calf muscles, which are essential for efficient, high-speed running, Live Science noted.

This evolutionary upgrade – found in *Homo erectus* and later humans – allows us to conserve energy and achieve greater speeds.

"Key features in the human body plan evolved specifically for improved running performance," the researchers wrote.

Even when they modified Lucy's simulation with modern human-like muscles, her small body size and proportionally shorter legs kept her slow.

Running was also energetically taxing for her, requiring up to three times more energy than it does for us – suggesting she probably ran only when absolutely necessary.

The authors noted that these findings provide a deeper understanding of human evolution, particularly the adaptations that made us long-distance runners.

Venezuela's Maria Machado freed

Government denies involvement in detention

Mayela Armas, Vivian Sequera and Deisy Buitrago
REUTERS

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado greets supporters at a protest in Caracas on Thursday.
LEONARDO FERNANDEZ VILORIA/REUTERS

CARACAS, Venezuela – Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado was freed on Thursday, her Vente Venezuela movement said, shortly after she was detained amid gunshots while leaving a protest in eastern Caracas.

Opposition demonstrations took place throughout the country in an eleventh-hour effort to put pressure on President Nicolas Maduro ahead of his third inauguration on Friday.

Machado was detained after making her first public appearance in months, prompting her ally, former presidential candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, to demand she be freed immediately.

During her detention, Machado was forced to record several videos, Vente Venezuela said in a statement on social media, adding it will give further details in the coming hours.

Government officials including Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello said her arrest was fabricated by the opposition in a bid to generate support for her movement.

"They end with the absurdity of absurdities, lying to say the government had captured Maria Corina," Cabello said during a ruling party march in Caracas, accusing Machado of filming the videos, which show her sitting on a curb and recounting losing her wallet during her detention.

Both the opposition and the ruling party claim to have won last year's presidential election.

The country's electoral authority and top court say Maduro, whose time in office has been marked by a deep economic and social crisis, won the July vote, though they have never published detailed tallies.

The government, which has accused the opposition of fomenting fascist plots against it, has said it will arrest Gonzalez should he return to the country and has detained prominent opposition members and activists in the lead-up to the inauguration.

Gonzalez, 75, has been on a tour of the Americas this week and met with U.S. President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump's national security adviser.

"We have and continue to condemn publicly Maduro and his representatives for attempting to intimidate Venezuela's democratic opposition," a White House National Security Council spokesperson said, adding Gonzalez is the "true winner" of the election.

Machado, 57, had urged protesters to peacefully flood the streets and repeatedly asked members of the police and military – who guarded polling stations during the election – to back Gonzalez's victory.

"Whatever they do, tomorrow they will finally bury themselves," Machado said during the protest. "Let no one be in doubt, what they do tomorrow marks the end of the regime."

Reuters witnesses estimated some 7,000 people had gathered in Caracas by around 2:20 p.m. local time. In the days after the election, thousands also took to the streets.

"I'm not afraid, I lost my fear a long time ago," said 70-year-old Neglis Payares, a retired central bank worker, as she gathered with other opposition supporters in western Caracas in the morning.

Maduro, 62, has been in power since 2013. He has the vociferous support of leaders in the armed forces and the intelligence services, which are run by close allies of Cabello.

More protests

In the western oil city of Maracaibo, an opposition protest of dozens of people was quickly dispersed by motorcycle-mounted security forces by late morning.

In central Valencia, protesters gathered at another location after initially being met with tear gas.

Opposition supporters also gathered in San Cristobal, near the border with Colombia, in the western city of Barquisimeto and in eastern Puerto Ordaz. In Maracay, security forces used tear gas to disperse protesters.

The ruling party held rival marches nationwide, images of which were broadcast on state television.

"We've come out to show that there is a democracy. On this side are the patriots who will be sworn in with Nicolas (Maduro), on the other side are fascists who want (foreign) intervention, war, to sell their country," said 50-year-old Caracas motorcycle taxi driver Manual Rincon.

Gonzalez has repeatedly pledged to return to Venezuela but given no details about how. An arrest warrant was issued for him for alleged conspiracy, prompting his September flight to Spain.

Machado is being investigated by the attorney general in at least two cases, but no warrant for her has been made public.

The government has detained several high-profile politicians and activists, including a former presidential candidate. This week, the attorney general's office said it had freed more than 1,500 of the 2,000 people, including teenagers, detained during post-election protests.

Venezuelans living abroad also held protests, including in Madrid, where Gonzalez's daughter Carolina Gonzalez spoke to hundreds of demonstrators.

"My dad sends a hug to all of you, glory to the brave people of Venezuela," she said, her voice breaking.

GLOBAL MARKETS

Treasury yields fall, dollar strengthens

US stock markets closed for day of Carter funeral

Chibuike Oguh and Nell Mackenzie
REUTERS

NEW YORK – U.S. Treasury yields retreated from an eight-month high on Thursday while the dollar strengthened against major currencies, as investors reevaluated the Federal Reserve's interest rate policy for 2025 with the U.S. economy showing signs of resilience.

The benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasury yield fell 0.45 basis points to 4.689%. It had hit a peak of 4.73% on Wednesday, the highest since April 2024. The pound headed for its biggest three-day drop in nearly two years.

A selloff in global bonds in recent weeks and worries about Britain's economy has kept the pound under pressure and also has hit gilts especially hard, driving yields to 16½-year highs.

On Friday, the closely watched U.S. monthly payrolls report will provide clues on the Fed's policy outlook. Markets are fully pricing in just one 25-basis-point U.S. rate cut in 2025.

"Yields have come down a little bit heading into the payroll number on Friday and it's indicative of where the level of concern is, which is that maybe the move in yields has been overdone," said Drew Matus, chief market strategist at MetLife Investment Management in New Jersey.

Minutes of the Fed's December policy meeting released on Wednesday showed officials were concerned President-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs and immigration policies may prolong the fight against inflation.

A market selloff in Treasuries continued on Wednesday after a CNN report that Trump was considering declaring a national economic emergency to provide a legal justification for a series of universal levies on allies and adversaries.

U.S. stock markets were closed on Thursday to mark the funeral of former President Jimmy Carter. U.S. bond markets closed early at 2 p.m. Eastern.

"I put the fair value 10-year yield at 4.50% and yet we're still at 4.66% heading into a report that will either show continuing strength in the labor market, in which case the rate cuts aren't the right thing to be doing, or show labor weakness and will ratify the Fed's view of the world against the backdrop of inflation that remains elevated and a high degree of uncertainty in policy and economic outcomes," Matus said.

European shares finished higher after paring early losses. Gains in health care and basic materials stocks were partially offset by declines in retailers. The pan-European STOXX 600 closed up 0.42%.

The U.S. dollar index traded just under 109.54, a level it hit last week for the first time since November 2022. The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of currencies including the yen and the euro, rose 0.12% to 109.15, with the euro down 0.18% at $1.0299.

Sterling was last down 0.44% at $1.2307.

China's yuan steadied near a 16-month low against the dollar as the nation's central bank announced a record amount of offshore yuan bill sales to support the currency.

Oil prices settled up more than 1% as cold weather gripped parts of the U.S. and Europe, boosting winter fuel demand.

Brent crude futures settled up 1% at $76.92 a barrel. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures settled up 0.82% to $73.92.

Gold prices advanced to a near four-week high, backed by safe-haven demand. Spot gold rose 0.27% to $2,669.38 an ounce, trading near its highest level since mid-December. U.S. gold futures rose 0.77% to $2,685.00 an ounce.

Minutes of the Fed's December policy meeting released on Wednesday showed officials were concerned President-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs and immigration policies may prolong the fight against inflation.

Trump, growth in focus for US earnings season

Caroline Valetkevitch
REUTERS

NEW YORK – Investors are watching to see if technology companies and related heavyweights will add to recent strong profit gains and whether growth is broadening to other sectors as corporate America prepares to report on the final quarter of another standout year for Wall Street.

They also want to hear what U.S. companies may say about the potential impact in 2025 from proposed tariffs, deregulation and tax policies under President-elect Donald Trump's new administration.

The fourth-quarter 2024 U.S. earnings season gets rolling next week, with some of the largest U.S. banks, including JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo, expected to report results on Wednesday.

Analysts expect S&P 500 companies overall to have increased earnings by 9.6% in the fourth quarter of 2024 compared with the year-ago period, which would be slightly better than the 9.1% earnings growth of last year's third quarter, according to data compiled by LSEG.

The S&P 500 rose 23% in 2024, its second-straight year of gains exceeding 20%, fueled in part by sharp gains in Nvidia, Microsoft and other U.S. megacap companies leading the race for artificial intelligence technology. Communication services, which includes companies such as Alphabet, and information technology had the biggest sector gains in 2024.

Even after a wobbly start to 2025, the S&P 500 is trading at a multiple of 21.5 times forward earnings, expensive compared to a 10-year average price-to-earnings ratio of about 18, based on LSEG data.

"We've had a lot of multiple expansion over the last couple of years. We need to see profits kind of follow through, so it will be important what these companies say about their fundamental conditions," said Anthony Saglimbene, chief market strategist at Ameriprise Financial in Troy, Michigan.

Expectations are high for big technology-related names, so they need to deliver upbeat results, he said, but "more sectors of the economy are expected to see profit growth start to accelerate, and that could start" with upcoming fourth-quarter results.

Communication services and technology companies dominated earnings gains in 2024, and they are estimated to have had among the biggest growth in the fourth quarter as well, LSEG data shows. But financials are seen on top for fourth-quarter 2024 growth as well, with estimated quarterly profit gains of 17.5%.

And profit growth is expected to broaden in 2025, with health care leading the way along with technology, and much stronger growth seen in industrials, materials and energy compared with 2024, based on the LSEG data.

"Growth rates are picking up from 2024 to 2025," said Stephanie Lang, chief investment officer at Homrich Berg in Atlanta, and "what we view as a positive is the broadening out of earnings."

Market watchers are also keen to hear from company executives about potential policy changes after Trump takes office on Jan. 20.

Some of Trump's plans, especially those for higher tariffs, could drive up consumer prices, while potentially less regulation under the new administration could fuel earnings growth in financials and other sectors.

CNN reported on Wednesday that Trump is considering declaring a national economic emergency to provide legal justification for a large swath of universal tariffs on both allies and adversaries.

"There's obviously a lot of uncertainty right now, and the timing of tariffs and the cadence in which they're rolled out matters a lot," said Timothy Chubb, chief investment officer at Girard, a Univest Wealth Division based in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

"I'm also interested in the color we might get from the banks on deregulation," he said.

Also, uncertainty over how many more times the Federal Reserve may cut interest rates in its current easing cycle is likely to put focus on company comments about the resilience of the consumer and the U.S. economy, which has so far defied expectations for a slowdown.

Biden praised the union and employers on a tentative deal which forestalled trade disruptions at ports on the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico. MIKE SEGAR/REUTERS FILE

Longshoremen's agreement may shape future labor talks

Lisa Baertlein and Daniel Wiessner
REUTERS

LOS ANGELES – A tentative labor deal forestalled potentially damaging trade disruptions at three-dozen U.S. East Coast and Gulf of Mexico ports, with both sides in the talks crediting President-elect Donald Trump for clearing the way for them to hammer out a deal on automation.

The success of the International Longshoremen's Association in winning Trump's support for its anti-automation battle could be instructive for unions facing contract renewals during his term, including the United Auto Workers, UPS Teamsters and the West Coast's International Longshore & Warehouse Union.

The deal, announced on Wednesday night, must be ratified by some 45,000 members of ILA and the United States Maritime Alliance, or USMX, employer group.

"This is a six-year détente in the tech-versus-labor tug-of-war at U.S. ports," said Judah Levine, head of research at Freightos, a freight-booking and payments platform.

It landed days before an extended Jan. 15 deadline, averting a second strike that could have put a huge dent in the economy at the start of Trump's second term on Jan. 20.

Father-and-son ILA leaders Harold and Dennis Daggett late on Wednesday called Trump a hero to the union and gave him "full credit" for the resolution of talks. They pointed to a Truth Social post in mid-December, where Trump appeared to side with the union's struggle against "foreign" employers after meeting with those ILA leaders.

"I've studied automation and know just about everything there is to know about it. The amount of money saved is nowhere near the distress, hurt and harm it causes for American Workers, in this case, our Longshoremen," Trump wrote.

The employer group, which includes Maersk's APM Terminals and the U.S. arms of major container carriers such as China's COSCO Shipping, said the agreement came "thanks in large part to President Trump's leadership."

The ILA and USMX extended their bargaining deadline after a deadlock over automation sparked a three-day strike in October at major ports including New York and New Jersey, Houston and Savannah, Georgia. President Joe Biden played a vital role in helping workers win a 62% raise over six years, which ended the October strike.

Biden praised the union and employers for reaching a tentative deal on Wednesday. Trump has not commented on Truth Social and his transition team did not immediately comment.

One pro-labor attorney cautioned against interpreting Trump's post on automation as union support, saying that it was in keeping with his pugilistic approach to international policies.

"It supports his narrative of going after foreigners," said Cathy Creighton, an attorney and director of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations in Buffalo.

Seeing the future?

In a prescient move, Teamsters President Sean O'Brien – who negotiated the last contract for members at UPS – notched a union first by speaking at the Republican National Convention, where he praised Trump's toughness. The Teamsters also broke with tradition and did not endorse a U.S. presidential candidate last year. The UPS contract expires in 2028, Trump's final year in office.

Pro-union attorneys said Trump's track record is not one of union support.

During his first term as president, Trump's appointees to the National Labor Relations Board issued a series of rulings seen as favoring businesses and making it more difficult for unions to organize workers. The board enforces workers' rights to organize and join unions and investigates allegations that employers have engaged in unlawful labor practices.

In December, Trump threatened to fire federal workers who do not return to the office for work. He also tasked Elon Musk, the world's richest person who has called the NLRB unconstitutional, with slashing the federal budget.

"I don't think he's going to support the labor movement," attorney Creighton said of Trump. "He has sought to undermine the labor movement."

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

Blazes

Continued from Page 1NN

nearly 180,000 people have been ordered to evacuate their homes, with another 200,000 under evacuation warnings, officials said.

The death toll is likely to rise, Los Angeles Sheriff Robert Luna told a news conference, adding that the Eaton Fire alone had damaged or destroyed 4,000 to 5,000 structures. Officials said the Palisades Fire destroyed another 5,300 structures, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Human remains detection teams would conduct house-to-house searches once it is safe, said County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone.

Private forecaster AccuWeather estimated the damage and economic loss at $135 billion to $150 billion, portending an arduous recovery and soaring homeowners' insurance costs.

In all, five wildfires burned in Los Angeles County, including one rapidly growing blaze that crossed the border from Ventura County. The skies buzzed with aircraft dropping retardant and water on the flaming hills.

With nerves on edge, Los Angeles County mistakenly sent an evacuation notice countywide to a population of 9.6 million, County Supervisor Janice Hahn said, but a correction was quickly sent.

Thousands of Angelenos fleeing the flames sought refuge in temporary shelters.

Some Pacific Palisades residents ventured back to areas the fire had already swept through, where brick chimneys were left looming over charred waste and burnt-out vehicles.

"I had just come from my family home where my mother lives that was burned to a crisp ... And then I came up to my home and – same thing. It's completely dust," said Oliver Allnatt, 36, wearing ski goggles and a filtered face mask as he took pictures of the ruins. "Basically just a chimney stack and a pile of ash. I mean, it's something out of a movie."

The Kenneth Fire, below, approaches homes while the Palisades Fire, above, continues to burn in Los Angeles County on Thursday. JOSH EDELSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

People embrace as they return to their home after it was burned down by the Eaton Fire in Altadena, Calif., on Thursday. RINGO CHIU/REUTERS

RIGHT: Neighbors gather as a family digs through the rubble of their home in Altadena, Calif., on Thursday. FRED GREAVES/REUTERS

Historic observatory threatened

The Eaton Fire's growth has been significantly slowed, Marrone said, though it remains 0% contained. While still strong, winds have diminished since the 100-mph gusts seen earlier in the week, permitting crucial aerial support for crews on the ground.

But officials warned that the wind was forecast to intensify again in the evening, with gusts of up to 60 mph. Red flag conditions were expected until Friday afternoon.

The Eaton Fire reached the grounds of the Mount Wilson Observatory, the place where a century ago Edwin Hubble discovered the existence of galaxies beyond the Milky Way and that the universe is expanding.

"There are firefighters on the grounds ... and (we) will update here as we can," the observatory said in a statement.

The two biggest conflagrations – the Palisades and Eaton fires – formed a pincer around the city so enormous that it was visible from space.

"It is safe to say that the Palisades Fire is one of the most destructive natural disasters in the history of Los Angeles," said City of Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley.

In Pacific Palisades, an upscale and picturesque enclave where many celebrities reside, once-palatial homes stood in ruins, while downed power lines and abandoned cars littered the roadways. The smell of heavy smoke filled the air, and residents wearing masks rode bicycles, hoping to catch a glimpse of their damaged houses.

Aerial video showed block after block of leveled homes, while satellite images showed thick plumes of smoke from the fires being blown in a southwesterly direction out over the Pacific Ocean.

Firefighting crews managed to control the Sunset Fire that forced mandatory evacuations in Hollywood and the Hollywood Hills. Flames raged atop the ridge overlooking Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame on Wednesday night as fleeing residents created traffic jam.

The fire was fully contained, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said on social media around midday on Thursday. No buildings were lost in the area, a city fire department spokeswoman said, and the evacuation order was lifted.

Celebrities offer aid

The homes of movie stars and celebrities were among those consumed by flames.

Chef Jose Andres, the Spaniard known for providing free food to disaster victims around the world, set up a food truck near the Palisades Fire on Pacific Coast Highway.

"Everybody needs support and love in these moments, wealthy or not, poor or not," he said.

Actor Jamie Lee Curtis said on Thursday her family would donate $1 million to relief efforts.

Firefighters from half a dozen other U.S. states were being rushed to California, while an additional 250 engine companies with 1,000 personnel were being moved from Northern California to Southern California.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose country has experienced its own severe wildfires, sent water bombers to Southern California to help, and said 250 Canadian firefighters were ready to deploy.

"To our American neighbours: Canada's here to help," Trudeau said.

Insurance

Continued from Page 1NN

jamin Keys as well as home-value data calculated by Zillow, a real-estate firm.

The fires raging around Los Angeles could be the most damaging in state history, officials say. The flames have devoured thousands of homes and businesses from the Pacific Ocean beaches to hills north of Los Angeles. At least seven people have died, and initial estimates of the damage range from $10 billion to more than $50 billion.

The relatively low cost of insurance in the Pacific Palisades reflects the vagaries of a homeowners' insurance market in the United States where prices can vary widely because of differing regulatory polices from state to state. Consumer-friendly regulations in California have kept a lid on prices, even in high-risk areas, but have prompted many insurers to scale back coverage.

Sangmin Oh, a finance professor at Columbia Business School, and other researchers found that homeowners in more loosely regulated states effectively subsidize homeowners in states like California, where the industry has been more tightly regulated – despite higher levels of risk.

Compared to home values, the average statewide premium in 2023 was the lowest among all 50 states, according to the Reuters analysis. California's high property values may make that insurance seem relatively cheap, but even on an absolute dollar basis residents the average annual premium of $2,200 was less than residents paid in 30 other states.

At least six fires have burned near Pacific Palisades since 1980, including a 2018 blaze that was the third-most expensive in California history. First Street, a climate risk research firm, found that 95% of the homes in Pacific Palisades face a "major" risk of burning to the ground.

Homeowners in Pacific Palisades paid a median insurance premium in 2023 of $5,450, according to the data compiled by Mulder and Keys. That's less than residents paid in Glencoe, Illinois, an upscale suburb of Chicago where homes are two-thirds cheaper and the risk of wildfire is minimal.

It's also less than residents paid in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, the poor and historically Black neighborhood submerged by floods waters during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 – even though the typical Ninth Ward home is worth less than 5% of the typical home in Pacific Palisades, according to Zillow.

Keeping up with extreme weather

The insurance industry in the U.S. has struggled to keep pace with extreme weather events in recent years, with more than two dozen billion-dollar wildfires, floods and other climate-related disasters in 2023 alone.

In hurricane-prone areas of Louisiana and Florida, insurance prices more than doubled after hurricanes in 2020, 2021 and 2022 threw state markets into turmoil, Keys and Mulder found.

In California, regulators until recently mandated price controls for home insurance, which limited annual increases. However, insurers fled the state as they struggled to turn a profit. According to state regulators, seven of the 12 largest insurers have paused or restricted new business since 2022.

Insurance companies dropped 1.72% of Californian homeowners' policies in 2023, according to a December report by the U.S. Senate Budget Committee. Only three other states – Florida, Louisiana and North Carolina – had a higher nonrenewal rate.

Dropped by their insurance companies, Californian homeowners increasingly turned to a state-run pool that provides bare-bones policies for those who can't find coverage elsewhere.

Some 450,000 homes – about 3% of all state residents – were covered through the California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements plan in September, a 40% increase from a year earlier. The fund is administered by the state but funded by insurance providers.

In Pacific Palisades, 1,430 homes were on the state plan, up 85% from the year earlier. The state pool now covers $5.9 billion worth of property in the area.

The increasing difficulty of finding insurance coverage prompted state regulators to reassess their approach.

The state's insurance commissioner, Ricardo Lara, announced an overhaul in December that will make it easier for insurers to raise rates and factor in climate risks and reinsurance costs when setting prices, but would also require them to offer coverage in high-risk areas. The new rules take effect this month.

Patrick Douville, a vice president of insurance with Morningstar, said insurers will try to continue to offer coverage in California, which is one of the most lucrative markets in the country. But they will struggle to provide affordable coverage in areas like Pacific Palisades that will remain risky even after this fire dies out.

"Insurers need randomness," he said in an interview. "If it's always the same folks who are targeted, you need to charge them an astronomical premium."

In divided vote, Supreme Court won't halt sentencing of Trump

Andrew Chung and John Kruzel
REUTERS

The U.S. Supreme Court acted after New York's top court on Thursday rejected Donald Trump's request to halt his sentencing. EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS FILE

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday cleared the way for Donald Trump to be sentenced for the president-elect's conviction on criminal charges involving hush money paid to an adult film star, with two conservative justices joining the three liberal members in 5-4 vote denying his bid to halt the proceedings.

The court turned down Trump's last-minute bid to prevent his sentencing, scheduled for Friday in New York state court in Manhattan. Chief Justice John Roberts and fellow conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined the court's three liberal justices – Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson – in the court's majority in denying Trump's request.

The brief order gave two reasons for the decision.

"First, the alleged evidentiary violations at president-elect Trump's state-court trial can be addressed in the ordinary course on appeal. Second, the burden that sentencing will impose on the president-elect's responsibilities is relatively insubstantial in light of the trial court's stated intent to impose a sentence of 'unconditional discharge' after a brief virtual hearing," the order stated.

The trial judge, Justice Juan Merchan, said last week he was not inclined to sentence the Republican president-elect to prison and would likely grant him unconditional discharge. This would place a guilty judgment on Trump's record, but would not impose custody, a fine or probation. Merchan will sentence Trump at 9:30 a.m. on Friday.

Four conservative justices – Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh – dissented from the decision, noting they would have granted Trump's request. The court has a 6-3 conservative majority. Trump appointed Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and Barrett to their lifetime posts on the court during his first term in office.

Trump had sought relief from the justices as he pursued a state court appeal to resolve questions of presidential immunity following a Supreme Court ruling last July that granted former presidents broad immunity from criminal prosecution for their official acts.

The Supreme Court acted after New York's top court on Thursday rejected Trump's request to halt his sentencing.

Manhattan prosecutors made a filing at the Supreme Court on Thursday morning, opposing Trump's bid for a stay.

"Defendant now asks this court to take the extraordinary step of intervening in a pending state criminal trial to prevent the scheduled sentencing from taking place – before final judgment has been entered by the trial court, and before any direct appellate review of defendant's conviction. There is no basis for such intervention," Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office wrote in a filing.

Trump in a Supreme Court filing made public on Wednesday had asked for proceedings in the case to stop as he seeks an appeal following the Supreme Court's landmark presidential immunity ruling last July.

"This appeal will ultimately result in the dismissal of the District Attorney's politically motivated prosecution that was flawed from the very beginning," Trump's lawyer John Sauer wrote in the filing.

Trump was found guilty last May of 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up a $130,000 payment to adult film star Stormy Daniels in exchange for her silence before the 2016 U.S. election about a sexual encounter she has said she had with Trump, which he has denied. Prosecutors have said the payment was designed to help Trump's chances in the 2016 election, when he defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump is the first former U.S. president to be criminally prosecuted and the first former president convicted of a crime.

Trump's lawyers contend that prosecutors improperly admitted evidence of Trump's official acts during the trial. They also argue that, as president-elect, Trump is immune from prosecution during the period between his November election victory and his inauguration.

'Only one president at a time'

In their filing on Thursday to the Supreme Court, the New York prosecutors said that "all of the evidence defendant challenged in his post-trial motion either concerned unofficial conduct that is not subject to any immunity, or is a matter of public record that is not subject to preclusion, as the trial court correctly held."

As to Trump's argument that he is immune as president-elect, the prosecutors said this "extraordinary immunity claim is unsupported by any decision from any court."

"It is axiomatic that there is only one president at a time," they added.

In the 6-3 July ruling authored by Chief Justice John Roberts, the Supreme Court said immunity for former presidents is "absolute" with respect to their "core constitutional powers," and a former president has "at least a presumptive immunity" for "acts within the outer perimeter of his official responsibility," meaning prosecutors face a high legal bar to overcome that presumption.

Merchan in December rejected Trump's immunity argument, finding that the hush money case dealt with Trump's personal conduct, not his official acts as president.

Ahead of last year's election, the Supreme Court in August rejected a bid by the state of Missouri's Republican attorney general to halt Trump's sentencing.

Biden's protections for trans students struck down by judge

Daniel Wiessner
REUTERS

Legal protections for transgender people were a major issue during the presidential campaign last year. HANNAH BEIER/REUTERS FILE

A federal judge in Kentucky on Thursday struck down a Biden administration rule barring discrimination by schools and colleges against transgender students, saying it clashes with the federal law banning sex bias in education.

U.S. District Judge Danny Reeves in Lexington agreed with six Republican-led states that while the law, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, permits sex-specific bathrooms, dorms and other facilities, the U.S. Department of Education rule improperly bans any distinctions based on sex.

Title IX prohibits discrimination "on the basis of sex" in federally funded educational programs.

"Expanding the meaning of 'on the basis of sex' to include 'gender identity' turns Title IX on its head," wrote Reeves, an appointee of Republican former President George W. Bush.

Critics of the rule have said it would require schools to allow transgender students who were born male to use women's restrooms and locker rooms at schools.

Reeves also said the rule would violate the free speech rights and religious freedom of educators under the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment by requiring them to use pronouns consistent with a student's gender identity rather than biological sex.

The U.S. Department of Justice and the Education Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The judge in June had temporarily blocked the rule from being enforced against the states, which are led by Tennessee.

Several other judges temporarily blocked the rule in 20 other states, and the U.S. Supreme Court in August declined to allow parts of the rule to take effect in 10 states pending appeals.

Thursday's decision is the first to permanently strike down the rule, which the administration of Republican President-elect Donald Trump is expected to repeal.

Legal protections for transgender people were a major issue during the presidential campaign last year.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti, a Republican, in a statement called Thursday's decision "a huge win ... for women and girls across America."

"The court's ruling is yet another repudiation of the Biden administration's relentless push to impose a radical gender ideology through unconstitutional and illegal rulemaking," Skrmetti said.

Kroger to pay $110M in Ky. opioid lawsuit

Nate Raymond
REUTERS

Kroger has agreed to pay $110 million to resolve a lawsuit by the state of Kentucky alleging the supermarket chain's pharmacies helped fuel a deadly opioid epidemic by flooding its communities with hundreds of millions of doses of addictive painkillers.

The settlement was announced on Thursday by Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman, whose state had opted to not participate in a broader $1.4 billion deal Kroger finalized last year that resolved similar claims by 30 states as well as counties, municipalities and Native American tribes.

In a lawsuit filed in state court in February, Coleman had alleged that Kroger's more than 100 Kentucky pharmacies had been responsible for over 11% of all opioid pills dispensed in the state from 2006 to 2019, or about 444 million opioid doses. The lawsuit alleged Kroger should have known based on the suspiciously high numbers and other red flags that the drugs were being diverted for illicit purposes, and should have taken measures to stop shipments and refuse to fill suspicious prescriptions.

Instead, Kroger continued to ship massive quantities of opioids throughout the state, failed to report suspicious orders to authorities and continued to dispense addictive drugs at "alarming" rates in Kentucky, which was hit hard by the drug-addiction epidemic, according to the lawsuit.

The Cincinnati-based supermarket chain, whose $25 billion proposed merger with rival Albertsons was terminated after courts blocked the deal last month, said in a statement it hoped the settlement funds would be used to combat opioid abuse in Kentucky.

Senate Dems help advance GOP bill on migrant crime

Legislation clears first procedural hurdle

Richard Cowan and Bo Erickson
REUTERS

The votes in Congress come just days before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, who has vowed to crack down on illegal immigration. PIROSCHKA VAN DE WOUW/REUTERS FILE

WASHINGTON – More than half of the U.S. Senate's Democrats joined with Republicans on Thursday to advance a bill that would require the federal government to detain migrants living in the country illegally who are suspected of crimes, even if they are not charged.

The Republican-majority Senate voted 84-9 – with 33 Democrats in favor – to move toward debating the legislation, named the Laken Riley Act after a Georgia college student who was murdered last year by a Venezuelan man previously arrested for shoplifting.

The bill passed the House of Representatives on Tuesday by a vote of 264-159, with 48 Democrats supporting it.

The Senate vote comes just 11 days before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, who campaigned on a promise to crack down on illegal immigration and "migrant crime."

A range of studies by academics and think tanks have shown that immigrants do not commit crime at a higher rate than native-born Americans.

But the qualified Democratic support of the bill, with some members saying they were ready to open debate on it but not necessarily in support of passing it, is an illustration of the effect Trump has had in focusing Americans' attention on the subject.

A December Reuters/Ipsos poll found that Americans ranked immigration as the top issue they wanted Trump to address in his first 100 days in office, with respondents overall favoring Republicans' approach to the issue over Democrats' by 42%-22%.

Ahead of the vote, Republican Sen. Katie Britt argued if Riley's killer was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after his arrest for shoplifting – as this new bill would ensure – Riley's family would be celebrating her 23rd birthday on Friday instead of the first anniversary of her murder.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer voted in favor, as did several other Democrats in competitive states, including Sens. John Fetterman and Ruben Gallego, who have both signed on as cosponsors, and Sen. Mark Kelly.

Thursday's vote does not necessarily mean the controversial bill will have enough votes to pass. Leading Democrats are expected to insist on amendments to achieve broader immigration reforms.

"If we get on the bill, Democrats want to have a robust debate where we can offer amendments and approve the bill," Schumer said on the Senate floor ahead of the Thursday vote.

Many of the Democrats who supported the bill hailed from states that Trump won in the November, including Sens. Gary Peters and Elissa Slotkin of Michigan and Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff of Georgia. Peters and Ossoff are among the one-third of the senators up for reelection next year.

Many Democrats see it as a backdoor way for racial profiling by law enforcement and trampling on constitutional protections.

"This bill ends due process for immigrants, including DACA recipients," said Democratic Rep. Veronica Escobar, referring to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that shields young undocumented immigrants brought across U.S. borders by parents or other adults.

Trump has used harsh terms when describing immigrants in the United States illegally or awaiting asylum hearings, calling them "animals" when talking about alleged criminal acts.

Carter

Continued from Page 1NN

Before the service began, Trump shook hands with his former vice president, Mike Pence, whom he had clashed with after Pence refused to go along with his attempts to overturn his 2020 election defeat.

Trump sat next to former President Barack Obama; the two men chatted amiably as introductory music played. To Obama's right sat Laura and George W. Bush and Hillary and Bill Clinton.

Biden and first lady Jill Biden arrived hand in hand and took seats in the first row next to Vice President Kamala Harris and second gentleman Douglas Emhoff.

The casket of former President Jimmy Carter is carried away at the Washington National Cathedral on Thursday. ELIZABETH FRANTZ/REUTERS

'Paw-paw' from Plains

Carter was born a peanut farmer in Plains, Georgia. He served as that state's governor from 1971 to 1975. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his humanitarian work.

One of his grandsons, Jason Carter, who serves as chair of the Carter Center Board of Trustees, said the man he called "Paw-paw" and his grandmother Rosalynn Carter, who died in 2023, remained humble and true to their values, choosing to remain in their modest home in Plains.

"Yes, they spent four years in the governor's mansion and four years in the White House but the other 92 years, they spent at home in Plains, Georgia," Jason Carter said.

Carter's remains returned to Plains.

"I never perceived a difference between his public face and his private one. He was the same person no matter who he was with or where he was, and for me, that's the definition of integrity. That honesty was matched by love," Jason Carter added.

Carter's daughter, Amy, joined other family members at the funeral. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Vice President-elect JD Vance and Biden's son Hunter were also among the mourners. Former Vice Presidents Al Gore and Pence sat side by side.

The Rev. Tony Lowden speaks during the funeral service for former President Jimmy Carter at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., on Thursday. ALEX BRANDON/POOL VIA REUTERS

Amy Carter, left, hugs Mary Prince during the funeral service for former President Jimmy Carter at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., Thursday. ALEX BRANDON/POOL VIA REUTERS

Rivals turned friends

Jimmy Carter won the White House by defeating Republican President Gerald Ford in the 1976 U.S. election, in the years following President Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal.

The one-time political rivals went on to form a lasting friendship, and Carter eulogized Ford following his 2006 death.

In one of the emotional highlights of the service, Ford's son, Steven, read a eulogy on Thursday that his father had written for Carter.

"Jimmy and I respected each other as adversaries even before we cherished one another as dear friends," Ford said in his father's words. "Jimmy knew my political vulnerabilities and he successfully pointed them out. Now I didn't like it, but little could I know that the outcome of that 1976 election would bring about one of my deepest and most enduring friendships."

Mourners who earlier paid their respects to Carter at the U.S. Capitol said they admired the late Southern Baptist, who played a key role in the negotiation of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty as a gentle man, rather than a partisan combatant.

"We've come so far from where Jimmy Carter was as a person and it's kinda sad," said Dorian DeHaan, 67, who traveled some 275 miles from Sugar Loaf, New York, to pay her respects. "I hope that this will be a reminder to people of what we need to get back to – that it's not about the power, it's about the people."

As she waited in the public viewing line outside the Capitol, DeHaan said her daughter married into the family of the president's younger sister, Ruth, presenting the opportunity to meet the former president in Plains, Georgia.

"But it's a sad moment," DeHaan said. "It's the end of an era and I think we kind of have lost this real belief in humanity, in our presidency."

IN BRIEF

Trump says meeting being set up with Putin; no timeline given

WASHINGTON – President-elect Donald Trump said on Thursday a meeting was being set up between him and Russian President Vladimir Putin, but the Republican offered no timeline for talks between the two leaders.

"He wants to meet, and we are setting it up," Trump said in remarks before a meeting with Republican governors at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida.

"President Putin wants to meet. He has said that even publicly and we have to get that war over with. That's a bloody mess," Trump said about the Russia-Ukraine war.

Trump's return to the White House on Jan. 20 has sparked hope of a diplomatic resolution to end Moscow's invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022, but it has also led to fears in Kyiv that a quick peace deal could come at a high price for Ukraine.

Court declines to block release of special counsel report on Trump

A U.S. appeals court on Thursday declined to block the U.S. Justice Department from releasing a special counsel's investigative report on President-elect Donald Trump's attempts to overturn his defeat in the 2020 election.

The ruling from the Atlanta-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit appeared to clear the way for the release of the report as early as next week.

The appeals court's decision did not immediately lift an order from U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon earlier this week pausing the release of the report. But Cannon set her order to expire three days after the appeals court ruled on the issue.

The report, if it is released, is likely to be the final act from special counsel Jack Smith, who brought two historic cases against Trump for attempting to subvert the 2020 election results and for mishandling classified documents.

Smith dropped both cases after Trump's election victory and neither reached a trial.

Gaza war toll likely significantly undercounts deaths, study says

LONDON – An official Palestinian tally of direct deaths in the Israel-Hamas war likely undercounted the number of casualties by 41% through the middle of 2024 as the Gaza Strip's health care infrastructure unraveled, according to a study published on Thursday.

The peer-reviewed statistical analysis published in The Lancet journal was conducted by academics at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Yale University and other institutions. Using a statistical method called capture-recapture analysis, the researchers sought to assess the death toll from Israel's air and ground campaign in Gaza in the first nine months of the war, between October 2023 and the end of June 2024.

They estimated 64,260 deaths due to traumatic injury during this period, about 41% higher than the official Palestinian Health Ministry count. The study said 59.1% were women, children and people over the age of 65. It did not provide an estimate of Palestinian combatants among the dead.

More than 46,000 people have been killed in the Gaza war, according to Palestinian health officials.

Security chief warns against violent attempt to arrest Yoon

SEOUL, South Korea – South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's security chief said on Friday the impeached leader, who faces arrest over a criminal probe into his Dec. 3 martial law bid, has been unfairly treated for a sitting leader and warned bloodshed must be avoided.

Park Chong-jun, head of the Presidential Security Service, is himself under investigation for obstructing official duty related to a six-hour standoff last week between PSS agents and investigators trying to execute an arrest warrant for Yoon.

Arriving at police headquarters for questioning, Park said the current attempt to arrest a sitting president is wrong and Yoon deserved treatment "becoming of" the country's status.

"I believe there should not be any physical clash or bloodshed under any circumstances," Park told reporters, adding acting President Choi Sang-mok has not responded to his request for safety assurances.

Hundreds of PSS agents blockaded the presidential compound and thwarted investigators from trying to arrest Yoon.

Reuters

Denmark: Greenland defenses have long been neglected

Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, Louise Rasmussen and Stine Jacobsen
REUTERS

Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen, left, and Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen meet with the media in Copenhagen on Thursday, the day of a meeting with party leaders regarding Greenland.
EMIL HELMS/RITZAU SCANPIX VIA REUTERS

COPENHAGEN, Denmark – Denmark acknowledged on Thursday it had long neglected the defense of Greenland, a vast and strategically important Arctic island, after President-elect Donald Trump said acquiring the Danish sovereign territory was vital for U.S. security.

Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, said this week that U.S. control of Greenland was an "absolute necessity" and did not rule out using military or economic action such as tariffs against Denmark to make it happen.

"We have neglected for many years to make the necessary investments in ships and in aircraft that will help monitor our kingdom, and that is what we are now trying to do something about," Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen told journalists.

The U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen said earlier on Thursday that the United States has no plans to increase its military presence in Greenland.

"There are no plans to increase the United States' current military footprint in Greenland," the spokesperson told Reuters. "We will continue to work closely with Copenhagen and Nuuk (Greenland's capital) to ensure any proposals meet our common security needs."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said late on Thursday she had asked for a meeting with Trump, but did not expect one to happen ahead of his inauguration.

Greenland, the world's largest island, has been controlled by Denmark for centuries, though its 57,000 people now govern their own domestic affairs.

The U.S. military maintains a permanent presence at the Pituffik air base in Greenland's northwest.

Greenland is crucial for the U.S. military and its ballistic missile early-warning system, since the shortest route from Europe to North America runs via the island.

"I think that the Americans are quite concerned that Russia could actually launch or initiate a major attack against the United States, and that could be done from the Russian side," analyst Jens Wenzel at Nordic Defence Analysis told Reuters.

"There is no real monitoring of the airspace in Greenland, it is largely a free-for-all," he said.

Greenland is already covered by U.S. security guarantees via Denmark's membership of NATO. Although the former colony is now broadly self-governing within the kingdom of Denmark, security and foreign affairs are still handled by Copenhagen.

Frederiksen said this week she could not imagine the United States would use military intervention in Greenland and said it was up to the people of Greenland to decide what they want.

Frederiksen summoned leaders of Denmark's political parties to a meeting on Thursday for a briefing about Trump's renewed interest. She rebuffed an offer from Trump in 2019 to buy Greenland.

On Wednesday, Frederiksen hosted Greenland's leader Mute Egede for talks in Copenhagen. Egede favors independence for his homeland and has said it is not for sale.

Egede discussed trade and other issues with the outgoing U.S. ambassador in Copenhagen on Wednesday, the embassy said.

Last month Trump said he had picked Ken Howery as the new U.S. envoy to Denmark. As a co-founder of PayPal, Howery is considered a member of the "PayPal Mafia" of former workers and executives at the digital finance firm that includes prominent Trump supporters Peter Thiel and Elon Musk.

"They're walking a tightrope," said Lin Alexandra Mortensgaard, a Greenland expert at the Danish Institute for International Studies, referring to the Danish and Greenland prime ministers.

"It's a balance between representing an autonomous territory and representing a sovereign state while still taking the requirements of Denmark's closest ally seriously," she said.

Denmark's European allies France and Germany have responded to Trump's comments by stressing the inviolability of borders.

Britain's Foreign Minister David Lammy said on Thursday he believed Trump recognized that Greenland was part of Denmark and that concerns about Russian and Chinese activity in the Arctic lay behind the U.S. president-elect's remarks.

The Kremlin said on Thursday that Moscow was following closely the "dramatic development" on Greenland and said the Arctic fell within Russia's zone of strategic national interests.

In Greenland, opinions on the island's future appear divided, with some warmly welcoming Trump's remarks and others responding skeptically.

Danish lawmakers across the political spectrum have urged Frederiksen, a Social Democrat, to firmly reject any attempt by foreign powers to undermine Greenland's status.

"The U.S. wants to take over Denmark's role in Greenland, and the Danish government must say a clear and unequivocal no to that," former conservative minister Rasmus Jarlov said on X.

Meanwhile, the screenwriter of the hit Danish TV drama series "Borgen," Adam Price, joked on Instagram that it was becoming "increasingly difficult to write political fiction when real-life politics are becoming more and more extreme."

"All that's left is to get some popcorn," he added.

Musk hosts German far-right leader on X

Sarah Marsh and Thomas Escritt
REUTERS

BERLIN – Elon Musk urged Germans to vote for the far-right Alternative for Germany, known as the AfD, in an upcoming election in a conversation with its leader on his social media platform X that highlighted the U.S. billionaire's growing ambition to sway European politics.

In a wide-ranging, sometimes stilted conversation that touched on immigration, German bureaucracy, energy policy, space colonization, God and Adolf Hitler, Musk and AfD chancellor candidate Alice Weidel agreed that the AfD was the answer to Germany's malaise.

"People really need to get behind AfD, otherwise things are going to get very, very much worse in Germany," Musk said. "I think Alice Weidel is a very reasonable person. Nothing outrageous is being proposed."

Musk was doubling down on his endorsement last month of the anti-immigration, anti-Islamic party labeled as right-wing-extremist by German security services, which has caused consternation in Berlin and accusations of undue influence.

The AfD has little chance of forming a government despite polling in second place as other parties refuse to work with it. Still, critics worry that Musk's support for the AfD could further bolster its popularity, eroding support for mainstream parties and making it harder for them to form a coherent coalition.

Musk's endorsement of the AfD and increasingly vocal support for far-right and anti-establishment parties across Europe comes after he last year used X and his vast wealth to help Republican candidate Donald Trump win the U.S. presidential election.

Speaking in fluent English, Weidel expressed gratitude for Musk's support, saying that the opportunity to speak with Musk was the first time in 10 years that she had been allowed a platform to say her piece without interruption from a media world that, she said, was biased against her.

While the two touched on policy, agreeing that Germany's decision to exit nuclear power was "crazy" and that immigration was out of control, they were more animated when discussing abstract matters.

Hitler comments

Asked by Musk to dispel any concerns that her party might be similar to Hitler's Nazis, Weidel said the genocidal dictator "was a communist" whereas hers was a "conservative libertarian" party.

"The biggest success (of other parties) after that terrible era in our history was to label Adolf Hitler as right and conservative. He was exactly the opposite. He wasn't a conservative, he wasn't a libertarian. He was a communist socialist guy," she said.

Almost all historians agree that Hitler, an eliminationist nationalist, was of the far right.

Musk has defended his right to weigh in on German politics because of his "significant investments," namely Tesla's first European plant, and has praised the AfD's approach to regulation, taxes and market deregulation.

Musk recalled the bureaucratic hurdles that confronted him in opening the German Tesla plant.

"I think it was 25,000 pages was our permit. And it had to be all printed on paper," Musk said.

"And then there has to be many, many copies made. So it literally was a truck of paper."

Last August, Musk held a similar talk with Trump, who has since tasked the entrepreneur with leading a drive in order to make U.S. government more efficient.

Weidel led the second half of the conversation, inviting Musk to explain his vision for peace in Ukraine, the colonization of Mars and the concept of God. On the latter two points, Musk was forthcoming, but he declined to be drawn on Ukraine, saying a settlement was a matter for Trump.

On energy, Musk backed Germany's renewable ambitions but agreed with Weidel that turning off the nuclear power plants was a bad idea.

"When I saw that Germany was turning off the power plants after being cut off from gas supplies from Russia, I thought ... this is one of the craziest things I've ever seen," he said.

Leaders across Europe have expressed alarm over Musk's political activities in recent days, with some urging the EU to use its laws more robustly to guard the continent's democracies from outside influence.

The European Commission has said it will look at the discussion as part of its ongoing probe into X and possible violations of its Digital Services Act for potentially giving preferential treatment to "certain types of content."

Panama remembers bloody past with a message for Trump

Elida Moreno
REUTERS

The incident, remembered every Jan. 9 as "Martyrs' Day," is regarded as paving the way for the eventual transfer of the canal to Panama in 1999. It also serves as a reminder of a bloody past that still dominates national feeling over the canal in Panama, at a time of rising tension with Trump.

PANAMA CITY – Hundreds of Panamanians marched on Thursday to mark the anniversary of a deadly uprising against U.S. control of the Panama Canal in 1964, with some protesters burning an effigy of President-elect Donald Trump who has threatened to retake the vital global waterway.

More than 20 Panamanians, many of them students, died during violent clashes across the country in January 1964, which escalated after U.S. security forces opened fire in response to mass demonstrations against the U.S. presence in the country and control of the canal. At least three U.S. soldiers also died.

The incident, remembered every Jan. 9 as "Martyrs' Day," is regarded as paving the way for the eventual transfer of the canal to Panama in 1999. It also serves as a reminder of a bloody past that still dominates national feeling over the canal in Panama, at a time of rising tension with Trump.

"Today is a day to remember the sacrifice of our martyrs, but also to say to the world that Panama is sovereign and the canal is ours," said Sebastian Quiroz, an 84-year-old retired unionist who was a student during the uprising.

The marching crowd chanted "spilled blood will never be forgotten" and "hands off Panama" as they approached the monument of the eternal flame, built to remember those that died in 1964. Earlier in the day, President Jose Raul Mulino laid a wreath at the site in a formal ceremony.

Trump on Tuesday refused to rule out using military or economic pressure to seize control of the canal, a 51-mile artificial waterway connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans that is a core international shipping route.

The president-elect has criticized the cost of moving goods through the canal and derided Chinese influence in the area. China does not control or administer the canal, but a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison Holdings has long managed two ports located on the canal's Caribbean and Pacific entrances.

Panama has strongly rebuked Trump's threats.

"The only hands that control the canal are Panamanian and that's how it will continue," Foreign Minister Javier Martinez-Acha told reporters on Tuesday.

Ivan Quintero, a 59-year-old university worker attending the march, said no government could take away what Panamanians had fought so long for.

"Mr. Trump has been very disrespectful in threatening to take the canal away from us," he said. "He has to learn to show respect."

SPORTS EXTRA

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Notre Dame kicker Mitch Jeter (98) celebrates after kicking the game-winning field goal during the fourth quarter of the Orange Bowl against Penn State on Thursday in Miami Gardens, Fla. KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

ALIVE AND KICKING

Late FG lifts Notre Dame past Penn State, into final

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — To his teammates, Notre Dame kicker Mitch Jeter has a new nickname this postseason.

Backup quarterback Steve Angeli said after Jeter's latest heroics, a 41-yard field goal with seven seconds left to knock off Penn State 27-24 in one of the College Football Playoff semifinals on Thursday, that Jeter is "Mr. January." Jeter is 7-for-8 on field-goal attempts in three games this postseason.

The victory in the Orange Bowl sends the Fighting Irish to the title game on Jan. 20 in Atlanta. Their opponent will be the winner of the Friday night Cotton Bowl matchup between fifth-seeded Texas and eighth-seeded Ohio State.

Seventh-seeded Notre Dame (14-1) won its 13th game in a row and will be playing for a national title for the first

See ORANGE BOWL, Page 3NS

Buckeyes WRs tough task for Longhorns

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

There are plenty of storylines heading into this year's Cotton Bowl, where two of the winningest programs in college football history will face off for a chance to play for the College Football Playoff national championship.

Still, when No. 5 Texas (13-2) and No. 8 Ohio State (12-2) meet in a semifinal matchup on Friday night in Arlington, Texas, the attention will be focused on the quarterbacks.

Cotton Bowl

Ohio State vs. Texas

Time/TV: Friday, 7:30 p.m. ET/ESPN

Where: AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas

Ohio State's Will Howard played against Texas when he was at Kansas State, but the Wildcats went 0-4 versus the Longhorns in those years. Texas' Quinn Ewers, meanwhile, started his college career with the Buckeyes before transferring to his home state's school.

"That was the only team I didn't beat when I was in the Big 12," Howard said. "There's definitely a little extra motivation because I never got the chance to beat these guys, played them for four years. They're always a good team, but I don't think — none of those games were unwinnable. Last year we lost in overtime. So, definitely excited to get another chance at these guys."

Ewers, who went to high school about 20 miles from AT&T Stadium at

See COTTON BOWL, Page 3NS

Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith catches a touchdown vs. Oregon in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1 in Pasadena, Calif. ROBERT HANASHIRO/IMAGN IMAGES

GOLF PGA TOUR

Six players share lead at Sony Open

Eric Cole plays his shot from the 14th tee during the first round of the Sony Open on Thursday at Waialae Country Club in Honolulu. MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Tom Hoge and England's Harry Hall are off to hot starts again in the Aloha State, as they are among six players tied for the first-round lead at the Sony Open in Hawaii.

Hoge and Hall tied for eighth last week at The Sentry, the PGA Tour's season-opening event in Kapalua, Hawaii. They sit level with Adam Schenk, Eric Cole, Denny McCarthy and Paul Peterson after each shot a 6-under-par 64 on Thursday at Waialae Country Club in Honolulu.

Seven players, none of them among the leaders, had yet to complete the round when play was halted due to darkness. Those players will finish the round early Friday before the second round begins at the previously scheduled time.

Ben Griffin, Patrick Fishburn, Sam Ryder, Ben Kohles, Sweden's Henrik Norlander and Canada's Adam Hadwin are tied for seventh place at 65.

Hall logged 10 birdies on Friday, the best single-round total of his PGA Tour career. He birdied four consecutive holes from No. 9 to No. 12. However, he also had a double bogey and two bogeys.

"(I) played really nice, really aggressive, putted really good and drove it exactly where I was looking today," said Hall, whose lone PGA Tour victory came last year at the Isco Championship. "If I can clean up a few things that happened, a couple bogeys and the double, if I can clean that up the next few days, it'll hopefully be a really good week."

See SONY OPEN, Page 7NS

FOOTBALL

NFL NOTEBOOK

NFL moves Vikings-Rams game to Arizona

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Monday's NFC wild-card playoff game between the Minnesota Vikings and Los Angeles Rams will be moved from Inglewood, Calif., to the Arizona Cardinals' stadium in Glendale, Ariz., the NFL said Thursday.

The game was moved out of the Los Angeles area as wildfires continued to ravage Southern California. The league said in its news release it was "in the interest of public safety" to make the move.

The game is still slated for 8 p.m. ET on Monday. The league had revealed Wednesday that its contingency plan for the game would be to move it to Arizona's State Farm Stadium.

The Rams took off from practice Wednesday and returned Thursday, but they headed home early and canceled post-practice media availability as a new fire had broken out in the West Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Both the Rams and the Los Angeles Chargers are preparing for playoff games this weekend. The Chargers, the fifth seed in the AFC, will face the fourth-seeded Texans in Houston on Saturday.

Ravens receiver Zay Flowers reacts after a tackle during Saturday's game against the Cleveland Browns in Baltimore. TOMMY GILLIGAN/IMAGN IMAGES

Ravens WR Flowers ruled out for playoff opener against Steelers

Baltimore Ravens wide receiver Zay Flowers did not participate in practice for the third straight day on Thursday and has been ruled out for Saturday's AFC wild-card game vs. the visiting Pittsburgh Steelers.

Flowers suffered a knee injury during Baltimore's 35-10 victory over the Cleveland Browns last Saturday in the regular-season finale.

"Zay Flowers is not going to be able to make it to the game this week," Ravens head coach John Harbaugh said on Thursday. "So, he'll get started again next week and we'll move forward with the guys we have, and we're excited about the guys we have, which is everybody else."

With Flowers sitting out against the Steelers, Rashod Bateman would be considered Baltimore's top wideout.

Flowers caught a 12-yard pass from quarterback Lamar Jackson and went to the ground at the Cleveland 12-yard line, where he was hit on the knee by Mohamoud Diabate as the Browns linebacker fell to the turf.

After getting medical attention on the field, Flowers walked with a slight limp to the sidelines with 12:03 to go in the quarter. He went to the blue medical tent before leaving the sideline for the locker room. The Ravens ruled him out for the rest of the game.

Falcons GM: 'Very comfortable' keeping Cousins as $27.5M backup

Falcons general manager Terry Fontenot claims benched quarterback Kirk Cousins could stick around Atlanta as a high-paid backup next season.

Fontenot said the franchise has no plan to release Cousins before his $10 million roster guarantee five days into the start of the new league year March 12, which had been widely reported in the aftermath of Atlanta benching Cousins and turning to Michael Penix Jr. for the final three games of the regular season.

Instead, Fontenot said the Falcons are fine abiding by the original structure and expectation of getting "two high-level seasons" of play from Cousins when they finalized a four-year, $180 million contract in March 2024.

Former Titans TE Wycheck had CTE at time of death

Former Tennessee Titans tight end Frank Wycheck suffered from chronic traumatic encephalopathy when he died in December 2023 at the age of 52.

The three-time Pro Bowler's family confirmed the diagnosis of CTE, a degenerative brain disease linked to repeated blows to the head, in a statement.

"Our family is grateful to learn of his confirmed CTE diagnosis in hopes to continue our father's desire to bring awareness, increased intervention, education, and support for NFL alumni and their families related to CTE," Wycheck's daughter, Deanna Wycheck Szabo, said in a statement.

"Our hope is that NFL alumni, who believe they are suffering from CTE, will be given the much-needed resources and guidance prior to their symptoms reaching a debilitating state. With ongoing CTE research and diagnosis', we hope future NFL alumni and families will be explicitly given an outline and plan of action in receiving care and treatment."

Wycheck was found dead in his Chattanooga, Tenn., home on Dec. 9, 2023, after an apparent fall.

49ers interview former Jets coach Saleh for DC post

The San Francisco 49ers interviewed former New York Jets head coach Robert Saleh for their vacant defensive coordinator opening.

Saleh formerly was the defensive coordinator for the 49ers from 2017-20. He then left to coach the Jets and went 20-36 over three-plus seasons with New York before being fired with a 2-3 mark this season. He finished the season as a consultant for the Green Bay Packers.

San Francisco also interviewed Deshea Townsend for the position. He is currently the Detroit Lions defensive passing game coordinator/defensive backs coach.

49ers plan to release DT Hargrave but not wide receiver Samuel

The San Francisco 49ers plan to release veteran defensive tackle Javon Hargrave with a post-June 1 designation when the new league year begins in March, general manager John Lynch confirmed.

Hargrave, 31, missed the last 14 games of the 2024 season with a torn right triceps. The two-time Pro Bowler has 45.5 sacks in 130 games with the Pittsburgh Steelers (2016-19), Philadelphia Eagles (2020-22) and 49ers.

Lynch said Wednesday that the 49ers have no such plans to release wide receiver Deebo Samuel, whose 806 yards from scrimmage in 2024 were his fewest since the 2020 campaign.

Agent: Dolphins WR Hill played season with broken wrist

Miami Dolphins star wide receiver Tyreek Hill played this entire season through a broken wrist, NFL agent Drew Rosenhaus said.

"Let's back up to training camp. Tyreek's scrimmaging with the Washington Commanders, and he breaks his wrist," Rosenhaus said on "The Pat McAfee Show."

"We have top wrist doctors saying to Tyreek, 'You need to get this operated on, you're going to miss the season.' Tyreek says to me and the Dolphins, 'I'm not going to miss the season, I'm going to play. I want to be here for my team.' "

Big Ten, SEC lead bowl winners, losers

Paul Myerberg
USA TODAY

With one team sent packing from the College Football Playoff in the opening round, another knocked out in the quarterfinals and a series of head-to-head losses to the Big Ten, this bowl season has left egg on the face of the SEC.

The conference can still claim the national championship should Texas beat Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl and then top Notre Dame or Penn State in the championship game.

To this point, however, how the SEC has fared in both the playoff and the traditional bowl slate has put a huge dent into the league's aura of invincibility. With two teams left in the playoff and wins in bowl matchups against the SEC, the Big Ten has made an unimpeachable case for being seen as the Bowl Subdivision's most powerful conference.

While the postseason continues this week with the national semifinals, the non-playoff bowl slate wrapped up on Saturday with Buffalo beating Liberty in the Bahamas Bowl.

Here are the biggest winners and losers from this year's postseason cycle:

Ohio State receiver Jeremiah Smith catches a touchdown pass against Tennessee's Rickey Gibson III on Dec. 21. SAMANTHA MADAR/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Winners

The final four: No team has been more impressive than Ohio State, which ran all over Tennessee in the opening round of the playoff and then avenged a regular-season loss to Oregon by routing the Ducks 41-21 in the Rose Bowl.

Heading into the semifinals, the Buckeyes are the obvious team to beat for the national championship. Texas was only lightly tested by Clemson but needed double overtime to escape Arizona State in the Peach Bowl with a 39-31 win.

Penn State's defense bottled up SMU in a 38-10 victory and then contained Boise State's Ashton Jeanty in the Fiesta Bowl. Notre Dame's defense clamped down on Indiana's high-powered offense to open the playoff and held Georgia to just 62 rushing yards and 4.9 yards per play in the Sugar Bowl.

American Athletic: If the Big Ten has been the class of the Power Four, the AAC has risen to the top of the postseason pecking order in the Group of Five.

The conference finished 6-2 in bowl games, including 3-1 in games against the Power Four: Florida beat Tulane 33-8 in the Gasparilla Bowl, but Memphis beat West Virginia 42-37 in the Frisco Bowl, East Carolina topped North Carolina State 26-21 in the Military Bowl and Navy beat Oklahoma 21-20 in the Armed Forces Bowl.

Florida: It's been quite a postseason for the SEC — more on that in a minute — but Florida's win against Tulane caps a terrific second half and should inflate the Gators' bandwagon heading into next season.

Once on the brink of throwing in the towel on the Billy Napier era, the school's decision to bring Napier back in 2025 sparked a major turnaround. One of the biggest reasons for optimism was rising sophomore quarterback DJ Lagway. He threw for 305 yards as Florida pulled away from the Green Wave in the third and fourth quarters to win eight games for the first time since 2020.

Nebraska: First the Cornhuskers snapped the Power Four's longest bowl drought by beating Wisconsin in November and booking a spot opposite Boston College in the Pinstripe Bowl.

Better yet, they actually beat the Eagles, 20-15, for the program's first bowl victory since the 2015 season.

Michigan: The defending national champions limped through most of this season behind one of the worst offenses in modern program history but exploded late, beating Ohio State to end the regular season and then Alabama in the ReliaQuest Bowl.

The 19-14 win saw Michigan rack up just 190 yards of total offense and 2.3 yards per carry. But credit the Wolverines for taking advantage of Alabama's miserable performance out of the gate: The Crimson Tide got started with a turnover on downs, a fumble, an interception and another fumble, handing Michigan an insurmountable 16-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Losers

The SEC: The league is 8-6 overall in the postseason, joining the Big Ten as the only Power Four leagues with a winning record in bowl play.

The SEC can tout strong bowl wins by Florida, Arkansas (Texas Tech in the Liberty Bowl), LSU (Baylor in the Texas Bowl) and Mississippi (Duke in the Gator Bowl), not to mention two playoff wins by Texas.

But the head-to-head results against the Big Ten are embarrassing: Missouri beat Iowa, but South Carolina lost to Illinois, Alabama lost to Michigan, Texas A&M lost to Southern California and Ohio State creamed Tennessee.

The ACC: If under much less scrutiny than the SEC, this has been a nightmare run for the ACC, starting with both SMU and Clemson losing on the road in the opening round of the playoff.

Overall, the league went 2-11 in bowl play, with wins from Syracuse (Washington State in the Holiday Bowl) and Louisville (Washington in the Sun Bowl).

In addition to N.C. State, the worst losses have come from Pittsburgh, which fell 48-46 in six overtimes to Toledo in the GameAbove Sports Bowl; Miami, which dropped a 42-41 decision to Iowa State in the Pop-Tarts Bowl; and North Carolina, which turned the page to the Bill Belichick era by losing 27-14 to Connecticut in the Fenway Bowl.

Alabama: They won't throw a parade for this Alabama team — but maybe they should, to celebrate the fact that this miserable season is finally over.

The year ended with that loss to Michigan, the latest letdown for a team that lost to Vanderbilt and Oklahoma during the regular season but was somehow still plugged as a worthy playoff participant. Yeah, right. Losing to the Wolverines ushers in the program's most anxiety ridden offseason in over a generation, as the spotlight turns fully onto coach Kalen DeBoer and his efforts to bring the Tide back into the national mix.

Colorado: In an era where most high-end NFL prospects opt out of the postseason and more and more transfers are heading into the portal before bowl games, Colorado quarterback Shedeur Sanders and Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter should be applauded for playing in the Alamo Bowl against Brigham Young.

Not that things went well from there: BYU was all over the Buffaloes in a 36-14 win that erases some — but only some — of the goodwill built up during a breakthrough 2024 season. Sanders threw for a season-low 208 yards and had multiple interceptions for only the second time in his two years in Boulder.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NOTEBOOK

Reports: QB Beck entering transfer portal

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Injured Georgia quarterback Carson Beck is not entering the NFL draft, but opted for the transfer portal and another year of college football.

According to multiple reports, Beck delayed entering the NFL because he's recovering from an injury to his throwing elbow. He was hurt in the SEC Championship win last month against Texas and unavailable following UCL surgery for the Bulldogs' playoff game against Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl.

A two-year starter at Georgia, Beck passed for 7,912 yards with 58 touchdowns and 20 interceptions for the Bulldogs. He spent five seasons at UGA and has one year of eligibility remaining.

On3 reported Miami, Ohio State and Texas Tech are among the programs in the running for Beck. Miami is replacing record-setting starter Cam Ward, the current favorite to be the No. 1 pick in the 2025 draft. Beck, who is from Jacksonville, Fla., was widely expected to play for Florida as a baseball and football prospect before he opted to head to Georgia.

Sources cited by ESPN said Beck is hoping to select his next team within a week but won't be cleared to throw until sometime in March.

Beck, 22, had surgery on his right elbow but is expected to be fully cleared for fall camp in August.

Field Level Media ranked Beck as the No. 6 quarterback in the 2025 draft.

Georgia quarterback Carson Beck, warming up before the SEC Championship game on Dec. 7, reportedly will transfer. BRETT DAVIS/IMAGN IMAGES

Vanderbilt TE Stowers to return for final season

First-team All-SEC tight end Eli Stowers will return to Vanderbilt for the 2025 season instead of heading to the NFL.

The 6-foot-4, 225-pound senior began his career at Texas A&M (2021-22), played at New Mexico State in 2023 and transferred to the Commodores in 2024.

Stowers told ESPN he is staying in Nashville another season in order to become "the best version of myself" and to help "change the culture and reputation of the program."

Stowers caught 49 passes for 638 yards and five touchdowns in 13 games for Vanderbilt (7-6), including 100-yard games against Georgia State, Alabama and Ball State. He has 84 catches for 1,004 yards and seven touchdowns in 33 career games, adding 35 carries for 132 yards and two scores.

Reports: UNC, Belichick land UConn DL Yates

UConn defensive lineman Pryce Yates is joining coach Bill Belichick's transfer portal class at North Carolina, multiple outlets reported.

Yates entered the transfer portal after earning defensive MVP honors in the Huskies' 27-14 victory against the Tar Heels in the Fenway Bowl on Dec. 28. He had a sack and three tackles for loss against his future teammates.

The 6-foot-4, 265-pound redshirt junior from San Antonio finished the 2024 season with 21 tackles, 6.5 tackles for loss and 3.5 sacks in seven games.

North Carolina has picked up commitments from at least 13 transfers since it hired Belichick last month to replace Mack Brown.

UConn coach Jim Mora voiced his displeasure with other teams "tampering" with his players just before Yates put his name in the portal on Dec. 30.

"A simple note to the schools and coaches that have blatantly broken @NCAAFootball rules by tampering with our players in the last 24 hours," Mora wrote on X.

"We do know who you are, we will pursue all avenues to hold you accountable. We are excited that we've built a program where coaches have to cheat to beat us and we will protect that program.

"Think hard before you tamper with our players."

Notre Dame's Christian Gray (29) celebrates with teammates after making an interception during the fourth quarter of the Orange Bowl against Penn State on Thursday in Miami Gardens, Fla. RICH STORRY/GETTY IMAGES

Texas quarterback Quinn Ewers passes the ball against Arizona State during the Peach Bowl on Jan. 1 in Atlanta. BRETT DAVIS/IMAGN IMAGES

Orange Bowl

Continued from Page 1

time since the 2013 BCS championship game, when it lost to Alabama in a contest played in Miami Gardens.

Christian Gray's diving interception of a pass from Penn State quarterback Drew Allar with 33 seconds left set up the Fighting Irish's winning score.

"Just catch the ball, that's all that was going through my mind, and I just made the play," said Gray, who also had two tackles and earned Defensive MVP honors.

Notre Dame quarterback Riley Leonard completed 15 of 23 passes for 223 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions and converted a key first down on the Fighting Irish's final drive to set up Jeter's game-winner.

On third-and-3, Leonard, who earned Offensive MVP honors, found Jaden Greathouse for 10 yards to the Penn State 25, and Leonard subsequently ran for 2 yards to make the field goal attempt closer. Jeter snuck the ball just inside the right upright.

"He's a confident guy," Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman said of Jeter. "There is no moment too big for Mitch."

Freeman, who made history by becoming the first Black coach to earn the chance to win a national championship, said of his players, "These guys are a bunch of savages. They're built different. I'm so proud of them and what they've accomplished. They've stayed together and found ways to improve and get better. This is a special group."

Gray's interception was the only turnover forced by Notre Dame, which entered the game leading the nation in that category, but the Irish had two other interceptions nullified by penalties.

"I should have just thrown it away," said Allar, who completed 12 of 23 passes for 135 yards and no touchdowns. "... We didn't win the game, so it wasn't good enough. I'll learn from it and just grow from it."

The sixth-seeded Nittany Lions (13-3) were looking for a shot at their first national title since 1986. They fell despite a stellar game from Nicholas Singleton, who tied an Orange Bowl record with three rushing touchdowns.

Singleton ran for 84 yards on 15 carries, and Kaytron Allen ran for 82 yards on 19 carries to pace a potent Penn State rushing attack, which amassed 204 yards on the ground overall.

Notre Dame 27, Penn State 24

Notre Dame	0	3	7	17 –	27
Penn State	0	10	0	14 –	24

Second Quarter

PSU–Ryan Barker 20 yd FG, 14:52.
PSU–Nicholas Singleton 5 yd run (Ryan Barker kick), 2:18.
ND–Mitch Jeter 41 yd FG, 0:00.

Third Quarter

ND–Riley Leonard 3 yd run (Mitch Jeter kick), 10:46.

Fourth Quarter

ND–Jeremiyah Love 2 yd run (Mitch Jeter kick), 14:07.
PSU–Nicholas Singleton 7 yd run (Ryan Barker kick), 10:20.
PSU–Nicholas Singleton 7 yd run (Ryan Barker kick), 7:55.
ND–Jaden Greathouse 54 yd pass from Riley Leonard (Mitch Jeter kick), 4:38.
ND–Mitch Jeter 41 yd FG, 0:08.

	ND	PSU
First downs	23	19
Total Net Yards	383	347
Rushes-yards	42-116	42-204
Passing	249	135
Punt Returns	2-8	1-0
Kickoff Returns	1-19	1-21
Interceptions Ret.	1-0	2-0
Comp-Att-Int	21-31-2	12-23-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	4-18	1-8
Punts	4-39.3	5-42.0
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	4-30	5-44
Time of Possession	29:54	30:06

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING–Notre Dame, Love 11-45, Leonard 19-35, Thomas 1-18, Williams 2-17, Price 7-13, Angeli 2-(minus 12). Penn State, Singleton 15-84, Allen 19-82, Warren 2-21, Allar 6-17.
PASSING–Notre Dame, Leonard 15-23-2-223, Angeli 6-7-0-44. Penn State, Allar 12-23-1-143.
RECEIVING–Notre Dame, Greathouse 7-105, Williams 5-66, Evans 5-58, Faison 2-25, Mitchell 1-7, Love 1-6. Penn State, Warren 6-76, Singleton 2-33, Dinkins 2-21, Reynolds 1-7, Allen 1-6.
MISSED FIELD GOALS–None.

Cotton Bowl

Continued from Page 1

Southlake Carroll, has never faced his former team and only had positive things to say about his one semester with the Buckeyes.

"I don't regret any decision I've made on going or anything like that, but the main reason I went was I felt like I had a great relationship with the coaching staff," Ewers said of his time at Ohio State.

"And they were winning a lot of games, and I wanted to go be a part of something like that.

"The reason that I came back to Texas was, one, to be closer to where I'm from and just closer to the resources that I have and the relationships that I've built over time just being from Texas."

Despite the neutral site, this is a home game for Texas. Still, the Buckeyes have a 3-1 record at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, including a 42-20 win over Oregon in January 2015 to win the first College Football Playoff national championship.

Ten years later, Texas will need to contain Ohio State's dynamic receiving corps led by Jeremiah Smith and Emeka Egbuka, who combined for 2,120 yards and 24 touchdown receptions. Each made 70 catches.

"Yeah, they've got an impressive group out at receiver," Texas defensive back Michael Taaffe said. "They've got four or five guys that are really dangerous. Obviously, Jeremiah is really good. Obviously, Emeka, No. 2, is elite. ... They've got guys you've got to respect out there."

In Ohio State's 41-21 shellacking of No. 1 Oregon in the CFP quarterfinal at the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day, Howard threw for 319 yards, with Smith hauling in seven catches for 187 yards and two touchdowns.

Another question is whether Texas can get its running game going after averaging just 1.8 yards in its 39-31 double-overtime victory over Arizona State in the quarterfinal at the Peach Bowl. The Longhorns' season average is 4.5 yards per attempt.

Texas coach Steve Sarkisian addressed the running game issues this week.

"We're at our best when we can run it," he said. "That gives us balance. So, I'm hard-pressed not to kind of just walk away from it and abandon it. We've got to do a great job as a staff of putting together a good game plan and making sure that our players can execute it at a high level."

Ohio State undoubtedly will be looking to get off to another fast start. The Buckeyes took a 34-8 lead into halftime against Ohio State and were up 21-0 after one quarter in their 42-17 win over No. 9 Tennessee in their first-round playoff game.

Buckeyes coach Ryan Day said the only motivation his team needs is simply staying alive in the championship race.

"One thing that does motivate our team is an opportunity for the team to play for another week together," he said.

"And this is a great group of guys that cares a lot about each other, have fun with each other. They love competing with each other. You can see the passion on the field when they get on the field. The way that this format is and the way the playoffs are set now, it allows us an opportunity to grow as a team and to learn and to get better and to peak late in the season."

The winner will meet No. 7 Notre Dame, which beat No. 6 Penn State on Thursday in the Orange Bowl, in the CFP championship Jan. 20 in Atlanta.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Shelstad, Oregon rally past Ohio St.

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Jackson Shelstad made two free throws with seven seconds left to put No. 15 Oregon ahead for good as the Ducks defeated host Ohio State 73-71 on Thursday in Columbus.

Shelstad made the shots for a 72-71 lead before Bruce Thornton missed an open 3-pointer with two seconds left. Nate Bittle added a foul shot with a second remaining for the final point for Oregon (14-2, 3-2 Big Ten).

Shelstad tied a career high with 24 points and Bittle added 21.

Earlier, with Ohio State trailing by one, Thornton stole the ball, which led to two free throws by John Mobley Jr. with 12.6 seconds left to put the Buckeyes (10-6, 2-3 Big Ten) ahead 71-70.

Thornton led Ohio State with 20 points. Mobley had 16, Sean Stewart put up 14 points and nine rebounds and Micah Parrish added 11 points.

Oregon trailed by nine until mounting a steady comeback to pull to within 67-65 on a 3-pointer by Keeshawn Barthelemy with 2:14 remaining.

The Ducks took a 68-67 lead on a triple by Shelstad, followed by a jumper from the corner by TJ Bamba with 41 seconds left.

The Buckeyes held their largest advantage, 41-32, early in the second half but Oregon was able to stay within striking distance and whittled the deficit to three with eight minutes left. The Buckeyes ended a 2½-minute drought when Thornton connected on a 3-pointer and increased the lead to 57-51.

Oregon guard Jackson Shelstad (3) dribbles past Ohio State guard Bruce Thornton on Thursday in Columbus, Ohio. JOSEPH MAIORANA/IMAGN IMAGES

No. 16 Michigan State 88, Washington 54

Jaden Akins had 20 points and Michigan State (13-2, 4-0 Big Ten) extended its winning streak to eight games with a victory over Washington (10-6, 1-4) in East Lansing, Mich.

Jeremy Fears Jr. notched his first career double-double with 12 points and a season-high 10 assists for the Spartans, who trailed for only nine seconds. Jase Richardson supplied 12 points and Tre Holloman tossed in 11 while dishing out six assists.

Tyler Harris led Washington with 14 points and Zoom Diallo added eight points. The Huskies didn't make a field goal during the first 10 minutes, missing their first 14 attempts while committing four turnovers.

Fears and Akins scored the first two Spartans baskets on 3-point shots. A pair of Richardson baskets sandwiched an Akins layup. Holloman found Szymon Zapala for an uncontested layup before Coen Carr brought the capacity crowd to its feet with a power dunk.

No. 20 Purdue 68, Rutgers 50

Braden Smith scored 16 points and dished out 14 assists and visiting Purdue (12-4, 4-1 Big Ten) never trailed in a win over Rutgers (8-8, 1-4) in Piscataway, N.J.

Trey Kaufman-Renn added 16 points for the Boilermakers, who shot 50 percent from the field in a slowly-paced game. Kaufman-Renn dunked off a Smith pass with 4:18 left that gave Purdue a 62-46 lead and sealed the outcome. Fletcher Loyer chipped in 13 points for the Boilermakers.

Freshman Ace Bailey scored a game-high 17 points for the Scarlet Knights, hitting four 3-pointers and grabbing seven rebounds. But the team's other prized freshman, Dylan Harper, made only 2 of 9 shots in 28 minutes and finished with just six points.

Rutgers trimmed a 14-point second half deficit to 46-41 at the 10:51 mark when Harper fed Tyson Acuff for a long 3-pointer. However, the Boilermakers responded with a 9-0 run that saw Smith dish to Gicarri Harris for a 3-pointer, score on a short jumper and later feed Loyer for a layup that made it 55-41 with 8:28 remaining.

Purdue limited the Scarlet Knights to 32.7 percent field-goal accuracy, including 7-of-23 on 3-pointers, and forced 16 turnovers. It also established a 38-20 advantage in paint points.

Smith entered the game playing some of the best basketball of his career, averaging 25.3 points and 9.7 assists in the Boilermakers' previous three games.

WOMEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 2 Gamecocks win 50th SEC game in row

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Freshman Joyce Edwards had 19 points and 10 rebounds off the bench to lead the host No. 2 South Carolina to a commanding 90-49 victory over Texas A&M on Thursday night in Columbia, S.C.

Edwards also dished out three assists while shooting 8-of-10 from the floor for South Carolina (15-1, 3-0 SEC). The Gamecocks also got 17 points from MiLaysia Fulwiley, 12 points from Sania Feagin, 11 points apiece from Tessa Johnson and Chloe Kitts, and 10 points from Bree Hall. Feagin made a 3-pointer, which marked her first make from deep of the season and just the third of her career.

Sole Williams paced Texas A&M (8-7, 1-2) with 10 points.

South Carolina jumped out to a 25-10 lead by the end of the first quarter and went on to lead by as many as 49 points. The Gamecocks shot 50.8 percent from the floor while holding the Aggies to 28.4 percent.

It was the 50th consecutive win for South Carolina in SEC play, and the Gamecocks' 66th straight victory in Columbia.

South Carolina guard MiLaysia Fulwiley (12) shoots a 3-pointer over Texas A&M guard Sahara Jones on Thursday in Columbia, S.C. JEFF BLAKE/IMAGN IMAGES

No. 3 Notre Dame 100, Wake Forest 64

Hannah Hidalgo poured in 23 points as the Fighting Irish got a home win over the visiting Demon Deacons in South Bend, Ind.

Hidalgo also tallied four rebounds, three assists and six steals for Notre Dame (13-2, 4-0 ACC) while shooting 8-of-11 from the floor. Olivia Miles piled up 13 points, nine assists and five rebounds, while Liatu King added 17 points, Sonia Citron chipped in 16, Maddy Westbeld scored 14, Kate Koval had 11. Notre Dame led wire-to-wire, shooting 55.2 percent from the floor and scoring 25 points off 19 turnovers by Wake.

Wake Forest (7-8, 0-4) was led by 17 points from Demeara Hinds, while Malaya Cowles contributed 15 points and 10 boards.

No. 5 Texas 84, No. 18 Alabama 40

Madison Booker tallied 21 points and Taylor Jones paired 11 points with 12 rebounds to help the Longhorns steamroll the Crimson Tide in Austin, Texas.

Rori Harmon added 10 points and Kyla Oldacre and Aaliyah Moore chipped in nine apiece for Texas (16-1, 3-0 SEC), which led 29-7 after the first quarter and went up by as many as 49 en route to its ninth straight win. Booker shot 8-of-10 from the floor as the Longhorns finished 50.8 percent for the game.

Karly Weathers was Alabama's top scorer despite managing just seven points. The Crimson Tide (15-2, 2-1) shot 26.8 percent overall and committed 20 turnovers that Texas converted into 33 points.

No. 6 LSU 89, Tennessee 87

Aneesah Morrow collected 23 points and 21 rebounds as the Tigers remained undefeated and captured a road win over the Volunteers in Knoxville, Tenn.

Flau'Jae Johnson added 20 points and eight rebounds for the Tigers (18-0, 3-0 SEC), while Kailyn Gilbert chipped in 22 points off the bench and Mikaylah Williams scored 16. The Tigers shot an abysmal 12.5 percent from 3-point land, but outscored the Lady Vols 60-30 in the paint.

Tennessee (13-2, 1-2) was steered by 25 points from Jewel Spear – who left the game briefly with an injury – and 24 points from Talaysia Cooper. Samara Spencer and Ruby Whitehorn contributed 10 points apiece.

Mississippi State 81, No. 10 Oklahoma 77

Jerkaila Jordan scored 12 of her game-high 24 points in the fourth quarter as the Bulldogs held on to upset the visiting Sooners in Starkville, Miss.

Eniya Russell chipped in 12 points for Mississippi State, including two free throws with 41 seconds left that broke a 72-72 tie and gave the Bulldogs (14-3, 1-2 SEC) the lead for good. Destiney McPhaul netted 10 points and Madina Okot had six points and 10 rebounds in the win.

Raegan Beers bundled 19 points with 10 rebounds and Payton Verhulst scored 15 for Oklahoma (13-3, 1-2), which trailed 31-17 in the second quarter and pulled even twice in the fourth but couldn't take the lead. The Sooners were outscored 25-12 in points off turnovers.

No. 19 North Carolina 53, No. 14 Duke 46, OT

Alyssa Ustby collected 10 points and 12 rebounds as the Tar Heels outlasted the rival Blue Devils in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Lanie Grant had nine points and went 7-of-7 on free throws for North Carolina (14-3, 2-2 ACC), which scored 10 of its 13 points in overtime at the foul line. Grant hit four free throws during the extra period, while Blanca Thomas made three and finished with seven points and eight rebounds.

Ashlon Jackson's 10 points led Duke (12-4, 3-1), which shot just 23.5 percent from the floor and 10-of-18 from the line. North Carolina made 32.1 percent of its shots and hit 17 of 25 free throws.

Virginia Tech 105, No. 13 Georiga Tech 94, 2OT

Lani White scored six points in Virginia Tech's explosive second overtime period as the visiting Hokies handed Georgia Tech its first loss of the season in Atlanta.

White finished with 20 points, while Carleigh Wenzel (24 points, 10 assists) and Rose Micheaux (20 points, 12 rebounds) both had double-doubles for Virginia Tech (11-4, 2-2 Atlantic Coast Conference). The Hokies outscored the Yellow Jackets 13-2 after Georgia Tech's Rusne Augustinaite drilled a buzzer-beating 3-pointer to force a second overtime.

Augustinaite finished with nine points, with the Yellow Jackets (15-1, 3-1) relying on 33 from Kara Dunn and 28 from Tonie Morgan. Dunn made 8 of 10 free throws and grabbed 10 rebounds for her third double-double this season.

Wenzel drained five 3-pointers for Virginia Tech, while Matilda Ekh and Carys Baker each canned three treys and finished with 17 points apiece.

No. 15 Kentucky 71, Florida 55

Georgia Amoore scored 18 points to lead the Wildcats to a road win over the Gators in Gainesville, Fla.

Amoore added five rebounds, four assists and four steals in the victory for Kentucky (14-1, 3-0 SEC). Dazia Lawrence added 14 points, while Clara Strack stuffed the stat sheet with 12 points, eight rebounds and four assists.

Florida (10-7, 1-2) was powered by 15 points from Laila Reynolds, 13 points from Jeriah Warren and 10 points from Liv McGill.

No. 24 Cal 78, No. 21 North Carolina State 71

All five starters scored in double figures to lead the Golden Bears past the visiting Wolfpack in Berkeley, Calif.

Marta Suarez led the way with 17 points for Cal (15-2, 3-1 ACC), which finished with 11 triples to NC State's nine made threes. Ugonne Onyiah, Kayla Williams and Ioanna Krimili all chipped in 15 points and Lulu Twidale added 11. Suarez made all four of her 3-point attempts.

Tilda Trygger posted 19 points and 10 rebounds to complement Aziaha James's 21 points for the Wolfpack (11-4, 3-1).

Illinois 62, No. 23 Iowa 57

Kendall Bostic recorded 17 points and 14 rebounds in the Fighting Illini's win over the Hawkeyes in Champaign, Ill.

Bostic made 8 of 12 shots for Illinois (12-4, 2-3 Big Ten), which got 12 points apiece from Adalia McKenzie and Genesis Bryant and 10 from Jasmine Brown-Hagger. Bryant hit two free throws with 11 seconds left after Iowa had closed within three points.

Hannah Stuelke notched 18 points and 13 rebounds and Lucy Olsen chipped in 16 points for the Hawkeyes (12-4, 2-3).

NBA

THURSDAY'S ROUNDUP

Cavs rally past Raptors for 12th straight win

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Darius Garland scored 40 points on 14-of-24 shooting, helping the Cleveland Cavaliers narrowly avoid an upset with a 132-126 win over the visiting Toronto Raptors on Wednesday.

The Cavaliers, who trailed by 12 points in the third quarter, extended their winning streak to 12 games while handing the Raptors their fourth loss in a row.

Cleveland's Evan Mobley scored 21 points on 7-of-11 shooting in addition to grabbing 11 rebounds and dishing out six assists. Jarrett Allen chipped in 18 points on 8-of-9 shooting and grabbed a team-high 15 rebounds, while Caris LeVert also had 18 points.

Chris Boucher led the Raptors with 23 points off the bench, hitting 5 of 6 from 3-point range, and pulled down nine rebounds. RJ Barrett added 18 points.

Garland delivered the clincher with 39.6 seconds remaining, burying an isolated step-back 3-pointer to give the Cavaliers a 129-124 lead. The bucket came directly after Allen made an outstanding hustle play to regain possession for Cleveland, preventing Toronto from getting a second opportunity to tie the game.

Cavaliers guard Caris LeVert dribbles in the first quarter of Thursday's game against the Toronto Raptors in Cleveland. DAVID RICHARD/IMAGN IMAGES

Warriors 107, Pistons 104

Buddy Hield scored 19 points to help lead Golden State over host Detroit.

Stephen Curry had 17 points, 10 rebounds and six assists while Trayce Jackson-Davis added 14 points and 10 rebounds for Golden State, which ended a two-game skid.

Cade Cunningham had 32 points and eight assists and Malik Beasley scored 21 points for Detroit, which had its five-game winning streak snapped.

After trailing by 18 midway through the fourth quarter, Detroit rallied and cut the deficit to 102-98 with 1:21 remaining in the game on a basket by Jalen Duren.

A dunk by Beasley with 23 seconds left sliced the gap to 104-102.

Suns 123, Hawks 115

Bradley Beal scored a game-high 25 points off the bench, leading Phoenix to a win over visiting Atlanta.

Grayson Allen and Kevin Durant added 23 points apiece for the Suns, who won their second game in three tries. Phoenix's Devin Booker collected 20 points and 12 assists. Tyus Jones chipped in 16 points, and Mason Plumlee recorded a team-high 10 rebounds.

Trae Young led Atlanta with 21 points and seven assists, Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 17 points and Dyson Daniels had 13 as the Hawks finished their road trip with a 2-4 record.

Vit Krejci and De'Andre Hunter scored 12 apiece, David Roddy added 11 and Clint Capela recorded 10 points and 11 rebounds.

Trailing 72-68 at halftime, Phoenix began the third quarter on a 7-0 run, with Jones' 3-pointer giving the Suns a 75-72 advantage.

After Krejci tied the game with a trey at the 9:40 mark, neither team took a lead larger than two points until layups from Durant and Oso Ighodaro gave the Suns an 89-86 edge with 3:08 left in the third.

Timberwolves 104, Magic 89

Julius Randle collected 23 points and 10 rebounds and Anthony Edwards added 21 points, lifting visiting Minnesota to a victory over Orlando.

Edwards had seven assists and joined Donte DiVincenzo in draining four 3-pointers to pace the Timberwolves to their third win in a row. Edwards, however, made just 5 of 19 shots from the floor and 4 of 11 from beyond the arc.

Minnesota's Naz Reid scored 16 points off the bench, DiVincenzo finished with 12 and Rudy Gobert recorded 10 points and 12 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

Orlando's Goga Bitadze collected 15 points and eight rebounds and Caleb Houstan had 14 points.

Rockets 119, Grizzlies 115

Alperen Sengun collected 32 points, 14 rebounds and five assists, Jalen Green added 27 points and Fred VanVleet contributed 22 to lead Houston past Memphis for its fifth straight road victory.

Ja Morant paced the Grizzlies with 27 points, and Jaren Jackson Jr. had 21 points and eight rebounds. Santi Aldama came off the bench to finish with 12 points and nine rebounds. Jackson, the Western Conference Defensive Player of the Month for December, had a season-high six blocks.

Morant and Aldama returned to action Thursday after brief injury-induced absences. Morant had been out since Dec. 27 with a shoulder injury, and Aldama hadn't played since Dec. 26 because of an ankle sprain. Desmond Bane also returned after missing Monday's win over Dallas with an ankle injury. He scored 16 points.

The Grizzlies and Rockets, who have the second- and third-most wins in the Western Conference behind Oklahoma City, met in the first of three games against each other this month.

Heat 97, Jazz 92

Tyler Herro scored 23 and Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 20 points for Miami in a win over Utah in Salt Lake City.

Herro and Jaquez each drained free throws in the waning moments as Miami improved to 2-1 on its six-game trip.

Bam Adebayo contributed 15 points, seven rebounds, three assists, three steals and two blocked shots in the victory. Adebayo hit two buckets in a row with under three minutes left to break an 86-86 tie.

Lauri Markkanen and Collin Sexton each scored 23 points for the Jazz, who lost their second straight outing. Utah overcame an 11-point third-quarter deficit but ended up losing for the ninth consecutive time at the Delta Center.

Neither team shot well, with the Jazz making 39.8 percent of their shots and the Heat shooting 39.6 percent.

Walker Kessler hauled in 15 rebounds with nine points, while Kyle Filipowski had 11 boards, two steals and a block with four points in the loss.

The Jazz started strong, taking a 20-10 lead when Markkanen dropped in a 3-pointer.

Mavericks 117, Trail Blazers 111

Jaden Hardy came off the bench to score a season-high 25 points and Dallas closed with an 18-2 run to rally for a victory over visiting Portland.

P.J. Washington recorded 23 points, 14 rebounds and three steals, and Dereck Lively II added 21 points, a season-best 16 rebounds and three blocked shots for the Mavericks. Spencer Dinwiddie scored 17 points and Quentin Grimes added 13 for Dallas, which won its second game in a row following a five-game skid.

Shaedon Sharpe had 22 points and eight rebounds, and Anfernee Simons also had 22 for Portland, which led nearly the entire contest before the late collapse.

Scoot Henderson had 20 points off the bench and Donovan Clingan recorded 11 points and 11 rebounds.

The game was moved up one hour due to inclement weather in Dallas.

The Mavericks continued to play without stars Luka Doncic (calf) and Kyrie Irving (back).

Portland shot 41.9 percent from the field.

Hornets at Lakers, ppd.

The NBA postponed Thursday's game between the Charlotte Hornets and host Lakers because of the wildfires in the Los Angeles area that have claimed over 1,000 structures in a total that reportedly includes the home of Lakers head coach JJ Redick.

ESPN reported Thursday that Redick's rental home in Pacific Palasades was lost in the biggest of multiple fires raging in the area that have been fueled by to intense winds and low humidity.

Redick addressed the threat to his home before Tuesday's 118-97 road loss to the Dallas Mavericks.

"I just want to acknowledge and send thoughts and prayers to everyone in the Palisades right now," Redick said at the time. "It's where I live. My family and my wife's family, my wife's twin sister, they've evacuated. I know that a lot of people are freaking out right now, including my family. ... I know a lot of people are scared. So I just want to acknowledge that"

A new date for Thursday's game at Cryto.com Arena will be announced at a later time, the league said.

THURSDAY'S BOX SCORES

Minnesota 104, Orlando 89

MINNESOTA (104)

McDaniels 1-4 5-5 7, Randle 8-16 6-6 23, Gobert 5-8 0-2 10, DiVincenzo 4-10 0-1 12, Edwards 5-19 7-9 21, Conley 3-7 2-2 9, Reid 5-9 4-6 16, Alexander-Walker 1-5 0-0 2, Minott 0-2 0-0 0, Garza 2-2 0-0 4, Clark 0-1 0-0 0, Miller 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 34-85 24-31 104.

ORLANDO (89)

Houstan 4-7 2-2 14, da Silva 2-9 2-2 6, Bitadze 7-11 1-1 15, Anthony 5-13 2-3 12, Caldwell-Pope 5-7 0-0 13, Howard 4-11 0-0 10, Queen 1-9 0-0 3, Carter Jr. 3-10 2-5 8, Isaac 1-4 2-2 4, Black 1-5 1-2 3, Joseph 0-0 1-2 1. Totals 33-86 13-19 89.

MIN	29	23	26	26	–	104
ORL	18	21	23	27	–	89

3-Point Goals: Minnesota 12-34 (DiVincenzo 4-7, Edwards 4-11, Reid 2-4, Conley 1-2, Randle 1-3, Clark 0-1, Minott 0-1, Miller 0-1, Alexander-Walker 0-2, McDaniels 0-2), Orlando 10-40 (Houstan 4-6, Caldwell-Pope 3-4, Howard 2-9, Queen 1-5, Bitadze 0-1, Isaac 0-2, Black 0-2, Carter Jr. 0-3, Anthony 0-3, da Silva 0-5). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Minnesota 50 (Gobert 12), Orlando 47 (da Silva 9). Assists: Minnesota 21 (Edwards 7), Orlando 21 (Anthony 5). Total Fouls: Minnesota 19, Orlando 22. A: 18,846 (18,500)

Cleveland 132, Toronto 126

TORONTO (126)

Barnes 11-20 2-4 24, Barrett 8-15 2-3 20, Poeltl 8-10 1-4 17, Dick 5-9 0-0 11, Quickley 4-10 0-0 10, Boucher 9-14 0-0 23, Mitchell 1-2 0-0 2, Shead 6-7 0-0 15, Walter 1-2 1-2 4, Olynyk 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 53-89 6-13 126.

CLEVELAND (132)

Mobley 7-11 4-6 21, Wade 2-6 0-0 5, Allen 8-9 2-4 18, Garland 14-22 8-9 40, LeVert 6-12 2-2 18, Strus 4-7 0-0 12, Jerome 2-5 4-4 8, Niang 3-8 0-0 8, Merrill 1-4 0-0 2, Okoro 0-5 0-0 0. Totals 47-89 20-25 132.

TOR	33	28	42	23	–	126
CLE	27	34	37	34	–	132

3-Point Goals: Toronto 14-31 (Boucher 5-8, Shead 3-3, Barrett 2-6, Quickley 2-6, Walter 1-2, Dick 1-3, Mitchell 0-1, Barnes 0-2), Cleveland 18-45 (Strus 4-7, Garland 4-7, LeVert 4-9, Mobley 3-5, Niang 2-5, Wade 1-5, Jerome 0-1, Merrill 0-2, Okoro 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Toronto 37 (Boucher 12), Cleveland 42 (Allen 15). Assists: Toronto 34 (Barnes 8), Cleveland 31 (Garland 9). Total Fouls: Toronto 17, Cleveland 11. A: 19,432 (20,562)

Golden State 107, Detroit 104

GOLDEN STATE (107)

Green 3-9 1-2 7, Hield 7-15 0-0 19, Jackson-Davis 7-9 0-2 14, Curry 5-21 5-5 17, Schroder 5-11 2-2 13, Santos 4-6 1-2 13, Looney 4-6 0-1 8, Waters III 4-7 0-0 11, Anderson 2-5 0-0 4, Spencer 0-0 1-2 1. Totals 41-89 10-16 107.

DETROIT (104)

Harris 6-8 0-0 13, Thompson 3-4 2-2 9, Duren 3-6 2-3 8, Beasley 8-21 1-1 21, Cunningham 12-21 5-8 32, Fontecchio 1-7 0-0 3, Holland II 3-9 2-2 11, Stewart 2-5 0-0 4, Sasser 1-5 0-0 3, Moore Jr. 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 39-86 12-16 104.

GSW	25	32	25	25	–	107
DET	23	24	27	30	–	104

3-Point Goals: Golden State 15-46 (Hield 5-11, Santos 4-6, Waters III 3-6, Curry 2-14, Schroder 1-5, Anderson 0-1, Green 0-3), Detroit 14-39 (Beasley 4-14, Cunningham 3-6, Holland II 3-8, Thompson 1-1, Sasser 1-2, Harris 1-3, Fontecchio 1-4, Stewart 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Golden State 49 (Curry, Jackson-Davis 10), Detroit 40 (Duren 12). Assists: Golden State 32 (Curry, Schroder 6), Detroit 25 (Cunningham 8). Total Fouls: Golden State 18, Detroit 19. A: 20,062 (21,000)

Dallas 117, Portland 111

PORTLAND (111)

Avdija 4-12 0-2 9, Camara 4-14 0-0 11, Ayton 3-6 0-0 6, Sharpe 8-19 3-3 22, Simons 9-22 0-0 22, Henderson 3-7 12-12 20, Clingan 4-4 2-3 11, Murray 2-3 0-0 5, Banton 2-6 0-0 5. Totals 39-93 17-20 111.

DALLAS (117)

Marshall 5-9 1-1 11, Washington 5-13 11-11 23, Lively II 9-13 3-3 21, Dinwiddie 5-12 6-8 17, Thompson 1-6 1-1 3, Hardy 10-18 0-1 25, Grimes 5-12 1-1 13, Kleber 0-0 2-2 2, Gafford 0-3 2-2 2, Prosper 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 40-88 27-30 117.

POR	28	30	31	22	–	111
DAL	20	33	28	36	–	117

3-Point Goals: Portland 16-36 (Simons 4-10, Sharpe 3-6, Camara 3-8, Henderson 2-4, Banton 1-1, Murray 1-1, Clingan 1-1, Avdija 1-5), Dallas 10-30 (Hardy 5-9, Washington 2-5, Grimes 2-6, Dinwiddie 1-5, Marshall 0-1, Thompson 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Portland 43 (Clingan 11), Dallas 53 (Lively II 15). Assists: Portland 24 (Avdija, Henderson, Simons 4), Dallas 26 (Dinwiddie 5). Total Fouls: Portland 22, Dallas 18. A: 19,241 (19,200)

Houston 119, Memphis 115

HOUSTON (119)

Brooks 2-15 0-0 5, Thompson 2-6 6-7 10, Sengun 12-20 7-15 32, Green 11-21 1-2 27, VanVleet 8-13 3-3 22, Tate 3-6 4-8 12, Whitmore 3-14 1-2 9, Adams 0-0 0-2 0, Holiday 0-1 2-2 2. Totals 41-96 24-41 119.

MEMPHIS (115)

Jackson Jr. 9-15 2-3 21, Wells 1-5 2-2 4, Edey 1-1 1-2 4, Bane 6-10 2-3 16, Morant 9-22 8-11 27, Kennard 4-7 0-0 11, Aldama 4-12 2-5 12, LaRavia 2-4 0-0 4, Clarke 4-5 0-0 8, Pippen Jr. 0-0 0-0 0, Huff 2-3 4-4 8. Totals 42-84 21-30 115.

HOU	45	23	33	18	–	119
MEM	36	27	29	23	–	115

3-Point Goals: Houston 13-34 (Green 4-8, VanVleet 3-7, Tate 2-3, Whitmore 2-6, Sengun 1-1, Brooks 1-8, Holiday 0-1), Memphis 10-32 (Kennard 3-5, Bane 2-5, Aldama 2-6, Edey 1-1, Jackson Jr. 1-4, Morant 1-5, Huff 0-1, LaRavia 0-2, Wells 0-3). Fouled Out: Memphis (Clarke). Rebounds: Houston 44 (Sengun 14), Memphis 43 (Aldama 9). Assists: Houston 21 (Sengun, Thompson 5), Memphis 20 (Bane, Jackson Jr. 4). Total Fouls: Houston 23, Memphis 28. A: 16,298 (18,119)

Phoenix 123, Atlanta 115

ATLANTA (115)

Krejci 4-8 1-1 12, Risacher 2-4 1-1 5, Capela 4-11 2-2 10, Daniels 6-12 0-0 13, Young 6-15 8-9 21, Bogdanovic 7-11 0-0 17, Hunter 3-9 4-4 12, Okongwu 4-7 0-0 8, Mathews 2-4 0-0 6, Roddy 4-5 0-0 11. Totals 42-86 16-17 115.

PHOENIX (123)

Dunn 3-5 0-0 6, Durant 9-15 3-4 23, Plumlee 1-1 0-0 2, Booker 9-21 2-3 20, Jones 6-12 0-0 16, Beal 11-16 1-2 25, Allen 7-8 4-4 23, Ighodaro 2-4 0-0 4, Morris 0-2 0-0 0, Okogie 1-1 2-2 4. Totals 49-85 12-15 123.

ATL	31	41	20	23	–	115
PHX	38	30	30	25	–	123

3-Point Goals: Atlanta 15-32 (Roddy 3-3, Krejci 3-5, Bogdanovic 3-6, Mathews 2-4, Hunter 2-7, Daniels 1-2, Young 1-4, Okongwu 0-1), Phoenix 13-33 (Allen 5-6, Jones 4-7, Beal 2-5, Durant 2-7, Booker 0-8). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Atlanta 32 (Capela 11), Phoenix 42 (Plumlee 10). Assists: Atlanta 32 (Young 7), Phoenix 33 (Booker 12). Total Fouls: Atlanta 19, Phoenix 15. A: 17,071 (18,055)

Miami 97, Utah 92

MIAMI (97)

Highsmith 2-7 0-0 5, Jaquez Jr. 7-11 3-4 20, Adebayo 6-13 2-4 15, Herro 7-17 5-5 23, Rozier 4-13 0-0 9, Jovic 4-13 1-2 11, Ware 4-5 0-0 8, Burks 2-7 0-0 6, Robinson 0-5 0-0 0. Totals 36-91 11-15 97.

UTAH (92)

Juzang 2-9 0-0 5, Markkanen 8-24 1-2 23, Kessler 4-5 1-2 9, Collier 3-5 2-2 8, Sexton 9-18 4-4 23, Filipowski 1-3 2-2 4, Williams 1-3 2-2 5, Mills 3-12 1-1 9, Eubanks 2-4 2-2 6, Potter 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 33-83 15-17 92.

MIA	20	26	22	29	–	97
UTA	27	14	29	22	–	92

3-Point Goals: Miami 14-50 (Herro 4-10, Jaquez Jr. 3-5, Burks 2-7, Jovic 2-7, Adebayo 1-2, Highsmith 1-6, Rozier 1-8, Robinson 0-5), Utah 11-36 (Markkanen 6-15, Mills 2-9, Williams 1-1, Sexton 1-3, Juzang 1-5, Filipowski 0-1, Collier 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Miami 49 (Adebayo, Burks, Herro, Jaquez Jr., Ware 7), Utah 49 (Kessler 15). Assists: Miami 26 (Jaquez Jr. 7), Utah 20 (Collier 9). Total Fouls: Miami 12, Utah 15. A: 18,175 (19,911)

League Leaders

Scoring Averages

	GP	PTS	AVG
Jokic, DEN	31	977	31.5
Antetokounmpo, MIL	29	909	31.3
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	36	1126	31.3
Tatum, BOS	34	957	28.2
Durant, PHX	25	684	27.4
Fox, SAC	35	933	26.7
Davis, LAL	34	878	25.8
Edwards, MIN	36	929	25.8
Maxey, PHI	29	740	25.5
Towns, NYK	35	886	25.3
Wembanyama, SAS	32	804	25.1
Brunson, NYK	37	925	25.0
Lillard, MIL	28	694	24.8
Booker, PHX	30	737	24.6
Irving, DAL	30	729	24.3
Cunningham, DET	33	793	24.0
Brown, BOS	30	718	23.9
James, LAL	33	787	23.9
Powell, LAC	30	712	23.7
Herro, MIA	35	825	23.6

NHL

THURSDAY'S ROUNDUP

Staal's hat trick propels Canes past Leafs

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Jordan Staal scored a hat trick and the Carolina Hurricanes overcame a two-goal deficit to defeat the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-3 on Thursday night in Raleigh, N.C.

Staal's third goal came 20 seconds into the third period, giving him a goal in each period and eight goals this season. It's the captain's fifth career hat trick and his first since April 10, 2022.

Eric Robinson, Jackson Blake and Seth Jarvis also scored for the Hurricanes, who played in the first of three home games across four nights. Jordan Martinook supplied three assists. Pyotr Kochetkov made 30 saves.

Nick Robertson, William Nylander and Auston Matthews had the goals for Toronto, which had a five-game winning streak snapped. Maple Leafs goalie Joseph Woll stopped 28 shots.

The Maple Leafs led 2-0 in the first period, going up on Robertson's goal just 1:59 into the game.

Nylander's goal was next on a breakaway with 7:29 to play in the period.

The Carolina Hurricanes' Jordan Staal (11) celebrates with teammates after his third goal against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday. JAYLYNN NASH/GETTY IMAGES

Blues 6, Ducks 2

Robert Thomas scored twice to lead St. Louis past visiting Anaheim.

Pavel Buchnevich and Jordan Kyrou each had a goal and an assist for the Blues, who have scored 37 goals in their last eight games.

Dylan Holloway and Tyler Tucker also scored for St. Louis, Brayden Schenn had two assists, and Joel Hofer made 21 saves.

Nikita Nesterenko and Sam Colangelo scored for the Ducks, who got off to a tough start to their six-game road trip.

Lukas Dostal allowed six goals on 22 shots for Anaheim before giving way to John Gibson, who stopped all 12 shots he faced.

The Blues raced to a 4-0 lead in the first 14 minutes of the game. Thomas scored 2:45 into the first period after pouncing on a turnover directly in front of the Anaheim net.

Less than two minutes later, Tucker scored on a slap shot from the right point off Oskar Sundqvist's pass from the left corner.

Rangers 3, Devils 2, OT

Sam Carrick scored with 2:12 remaining in overtime as New York earned a victory over visiting New Jersey.

The Rangers avoided their third straight loss in as many meetings this season to the Devils, who outscored them by a combined 10-1 margin last month.

After New Jersey goalie Jacob Markstrom stopped Mika Zibanejad and Artemi Panarin on breakaways earlier in overtime, the Rangers made a defensive play to set up a 2-on-1.

Reilly Smith pried the puck away from Jack Hughes and moved into New York's offensive zone. Smith made a cross-ice pass in the slot to Carrick, who lifted the puck by Markstrom from the right circle.

Carrick's winner gave the Rangers a point in three straight games (2-0-1).

Adam Fox and Panarin scored power-play goals for the Rangers.

Stars 4, Flyers 1

Casey DeSmith made 27 saves and four Dallas players scored as the Stars rolled over host Philadelphia for their sixth consecutive win.

Mavrik Bourque, Roope Hintz, Wyatt Johnston and Miro Heiskanen tallied for Dallas, which is 7-0-1 in the past eight games. Jason Robertson chipped in two assists as the Stars improved to 2-0-0 on their five-game road trip, which continues north of the border with upcoming matchups against Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

Morgan Frost scored the lone goal for the Flyers, who fell to 0-3-1 in their last four games. Samuel Ersson returned from a three-game absence caused by a lower-body injury and finished with 19 saves.

Less than two minutes into the game, Dallas' Matt Dumba moved down the right side and centered the puck, which Bourque deflected past Ersson.

Sabres 4, Senators 0

Jack Quinn scored twice and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 35 saves to help visiting Buffalo to a win against Ottawa.

The shutout is Luukkonen's second of the season.

Ryan McLeod had a goal and two assists for the Sabres, who are 5-2-1 since a 13-game losing streak (0-10-3).

Anton Forsberg made 17 saves for the Senators.

After taking a penalty to negate a Buffalo power play, Quinn made up for it a few minutes later to give the visitors a 1-0 lead at 10:17 of the first period. Zach Benson sent a short pass up in the neutral zone for McLeod, and McLeod fed it over to Quinn, who beat Forsberg.

He atoned for yet another penalty to make it 2-0 at 13:17. McLeod blocked Thomas Chabot's shot from the blue line and Peyton Krebs collected the loose puck and sprung Quinn, fresh out of the box, for a breakaway.

Avalanche 6, Wild 1

Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen and Logan O'Connor each had a goal and an assist as Colorado cruised to a win over Minnesota in Saint Paul, Minn.

Ross Colton, Parker Kelly and Artturi Lehkonen added one goal apiece for Colorado, which bounced back from a 3-1 road loss to the Chicago Blackhawks one night earlier. Jonathan Drouin and Josh Manson each finished with two assists.

Goaltender Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 24 of 25 shots, helping the Avalanche improve to 8-1-1 in their past 10 games.

Zach Bogosian scored the lone goal for the Wild, whose four-game winning streak ended. Minnesota goaltender Filip Gustavsson gave up six goals on 27 shots.

O'Connor started the scoring 3:46 after the opening faceoff.

Penguins 5, Oilers 3

Sydney Crosby moved up in the NHL record book, and Bryan Rust ignited a four-goal outburst in the first period as Pittsburgh defeated visiting Edmonton.

It was the Penguins' first win over the Oilers in more than five years.

Crosby collected a goal and two assists to pass Joe Sakic for ninth on the league's all-time points list with 1,643. Rust also scored a goal and earned two assists, all in the first period. Drew O'Connor added a goal and an assist, Rickard Rakell and Kevin Hayes also scored, and Marcus Pettersson added a pair of assists.

Leon Draisaitl, who entered Thursday with a league-leading 29 goals, scored a pair to become the NHL's first to 30 this season. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins also scored, and Connor McDavid assisted on all three.

Alex Nedeljkovic made a season-high 39 saves for the Penguins.

Lightning 4, Bruins 1

Anthony Cirelli and Michael Eyssimont scored second-period goals as host Tampa Bay beat Boston to extend the Bruins' season-worst losing streak to six games.

The Lightning won the first of four meetings between the Atlantic Division clubs by getting a short-handed goal by Cirelli and an even-strength tally from Eyssimont for a 2-0 edge. That was enough for their second straight win to improve to 2-5-0 within the division.

Ryan McDonagh notched two assists for Tampa Bay to eclipse 400 career points, while Brayden Point recorded his 600th point with the game's final tally. Brandon Hagel registered a goal and an assist, Nikita Kucherov added a pair of helpers and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 27 saves in the win.

Andrew Peeke and Brad Marchand assisted on Mason Lohrei's goal for Boston.

Blue Jackets 6, Kraken 2

Denton Mateychuk scored his first career NHL goal and Luca Del Bel Belluz notched his second as Columbus defeated visiting Seattle.

Sean Kuraly, Zach Werenski, Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko also scored and James van Riemsdyk added a pair of assists for the Blue Jackets, who won their third game in a row. Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins made 29 saves.

Eeli Tolvanen tallied twice for the Kraken, whose winless streak reached four games (0-3-1). Philipp Grubauer, making his sixth consecutive start, was pulled at 15:45 of the second period after allowing five goals on 19 shots. Joey Daccord (lower body), who was activated off the injured list Wednesday, stopped all four shots he faced the rest of the way.

With the score tied 1-1, the Blue Jackets scored four unanswered goals in the second period to pull away.

Islanders 4, Golden Knights 0

Ilya Sorokin made 30 saves for his 20th career shutout and Brock Nelson had a goal and an assist to lead New York to a victory over host Vegas.

Anders Lee, Bo Horvat and Casey Cizikas also scored goals and Alexander Romanov had two assists for New York, which won its second straight game matching a season high. It was Sorokin's second shutout of the season.

Adin Hill made 17 saves for Vegas, which had a three-game winning streak snapped. It was just the fifth home loss of the season (17-5-0) for the NHL point-leaders, who were denied a chance to become the league's first team to hit the 60-point mark.

Vegas appeared to take a 1-0 lead at the 13:50 mark of the first period on a power-play goal by Tomas Hertl but the Islanders correctly challenged that Hertl was offside on the play. and the goal was waved off.

THURSDAY'S SUMMARIES

Pittsburgh 5, Edmonton 3

Edmonton	1	2	0	– 3
Pittsburgh	4	1	0	– 5

First Period–1, Pittsburgh, Rakell 21 (Rust, Pettersson), 3:19. 1, Pittsburgh, Rust 16 (Pettersson, Crosby), 7:22. 1, Pittsburgh, Hayes 6 (O'Connor, Puljujarvi), 9:46. 1, Edmonton, Draisaitl 30 (Hyman, McDavid), 12:33. 1, Pittsburgh, O'Connor 6 (Rust, Crosby), 13:41. Penalties–None.
Second Period–1, Pittsburgh, Crosby 12 (Bunting, Karlsson), 5:42. 2, Edmonton, Draisaitl 31 (McDavid, Ekholm), 10:58. 1, Edmonton, Nugent-Hopkins 11 (McDavid, Bouchard), 19:15. Penalties–Podkolzin, EDM (Tripping), 5:01. Letang, PIT (Slashing), 6:07. Kapanen, EDM (Unsportsmanlike conduct), 10:58. Bunting, PIT (Unsportsmanlike conduct), 10:58. Rust, PIT (Interference), 18:09.
Third Period–None. Penalties–Bunting, PIT (Roughing), 11:04.
Shots on Goal–Edmonton 7-20-16–43. Pittsburgh 13-6-7–26.
Power-play opportunities–Edmonton 1 of 3; Pittsburgh 1 of 1.
Goalies–Edmonton, Skinner 16-9-3 (26 shots-21 saves). Pittsburgh, Nedeljkovic 7-6-4 (43-40).
A–17,004 (18,087).

Colorado 6, Minnesota 1

Colorado	2	1	3	– 6
Minnesota	1	0	0	– 1

First Period–1, Colorado, O'Connor 5 (Manson), 3:46. 1, Colorado, Colton 13, 16:52. 1, Minnesota, Bogosian 4 (Gaudreau, Trenin), 18:27. Penalties–Merrill, MIN (Slashing), 14:19.
Second Period–1, Colorado, Rantanen 25 (MacKinnon, Drouin), 13:00. Penalties–Middleton, MIN (High-sticking), 3:41. Parssinen, COL (Interference), 13:55.
Third Period–1, Colorado, Kelly 4 (Kiviranta, O'Connor), 4:23. 1, Colorado, Lehkonen 15 (Manson), 7:42. 1, Colorado, MacKinnon 15 (Drouin, Rantanen), 8:48. Penalties–Trenin, MIN (Slashing), 0:40. Mittelstadt, COL (Cross-checking), 6:04. Makar, COL (Tripping), 15:37.
Shots on Goal–Colorado 8-11-8–27. Minnesota 4-8-13–25.
Power-play opportunities–Colorado 0 of 3; Minnesota 0 of 3.
Goalies–Colorado, Blackwood 14-10-4 (25 shots-24 saves). Minnesota, Gustavsson 18-7-3 (27-21).
A–18,979 (18,064).

Columbus 6, Seattle 2

Seattle	1	0	1	– 2
Columbus	1	4	1	– 6

First Period–1, Columbus, Kuraly 4 (Provorov, Olivier), 11:58. 1, Seattle, Tolvanen 9 (Wright, McCann), 12:08. Penalties–McCann, SEA (Cross-checking), 16:02. Pyyhtia, CBJ (Tripping), 19:43.
Second Period–1, Columbus, Del Bel Belluz 1 (van Riemsdyk, Severson), 3:29. 1, Columbus, Werenski 13 (Fantilli, Voronkov), 10:53. 1, Columbus, Mateychuk 1 (van Riemsdyk, Del Bel Belluz), 12:27. 1, Columbus, Johnson 11 (Werenski, Fabbro), 15:45. Penalties–None.
Third Period–2, Seattle, Tolvanen 10 (Stephenson, Montour), 8:44. 1, Columbus, Marchenko 18 (Mateychuk), 19:31. Penalties–Fabbro, CBJ (Interference), 11:10. Sillinger, CBJ (Hooking), 17:09.
Shots on Goal–Seattle 12-8-10–30. Columbus 7-14-3–24.
Power-play opportunities–Seattle 0 of 3; Columbus 0 of 1.
Goalies–Seattle, Daccord (4 shots-4 saves), Grubauer 5-13-1 (19-14). Columbus, Merzlikins 15-10-3 (30-28).
A–15,497 (18,144).

N.Y. Rangers 3, New Jersey 2 (OT)

New Jersey	0	2	0	0	– 2
N.Y. Rangers	1	1	0	1	– 3

First Period–1, N.Y. Rangers, Fox 2 (Trocheck), 12:05. Penalties–Fox, NYR (High-sticking), 6:01. N.Y. Rangers bench, served by Berard (Too many men), 8:29. MacDermid, NJD (Interference), 12:00.
Second Period–1, New Jersey, Hughes 16 (Pesce, Palat), 4:03. 1, New Jersey, Bratt 15 (Hughes), 8:28. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Panarin 17 (Zibanejad, Fox), 17:13. Penalties–Lafreniere, NYR (High-sticking), 8:34. Hischier, NJD (Slashing), 15:40.
Third Period–None. Penalties–Bastian, NJD (Tripping), 10:39. Zibanejad, NYR (Slashing), 11:34.
Overtime–1, N.Y. Rangers, Carrick 3 (Smith), 2:48. Penalties–None.
Shots on Goal–New Jersey 11-5-6-1–23. N.Y. Rangers 8-9-13-3–33.
Power-play opportunities–New Jersey 0 of 4; N.Y. Rangers 2 of 3.
Goalies–New Jersey, Markstrom (33 shots-30 saves). N.Y. Rangers, Shesterkin 12-15-1 (23-21).
A–18,006 (18,200).

Carolina 6, Toronto 3

Toronto	2	1	0	– 3
Carolina	2	2	2	– 6

First Period–1, Toronto, Robertson 7 (Domi, Lorentz), 1:59. 1, Toronto, Nylander 24, 7:29. 1, Carolina, Robinson 10 (Smith, Necas), 13:58. 1, Carolina, Staal 6 (Svechnikov, Martinook), 14:15. Penalties–Rielly, TOR (Tripping), 16:40.
Second Period–2, Carolina, Staal 7 (Martinook, Slavin), 0:35. 1, Toronto, Matthews 14 (Knies, Marner), 1:11. 1, Carolina, Blake 9 (Jaaska, Orlov), 4:58. Penalties–Burns, CAR (High-sticking), 0:19. McMann, TOR (Interference), 6:35. Matthews, TOR (Slashing), 12:38. Chatfield, CAR (Tripping), 17:57.
Third Period–3, Carolina, Staal 8 (Burns, Martinook), 0:20. 1, Carolina, Jarvis 12, 16:23. Penalties–None.
Shots on Goal–Toronto 13-8-12–33. Carolina 12-12-10–34.
Power-play opportunities–Toronto 1 of 2; Carolina 0 of 3.
Goalies–Toronto, Woll 14-7-0 (33 shots-28 saves). Carolina, Kochetkov 16-9-1 (33-30).
A–18,750 (18,680).

Buffalo 4, Ottawa 0

Buffalo	2	2	0	– 4
Ottawa	0	0	0	– 0

First Period–1, Buffalo, Quinn 6 (McLeod, Benson), 10:17. 2, Buffalo, Quinn 7 (Krebs, McLeod), 13:17. Penalties–Tkachuk, OTT (Charging), 4:44. Quinn, BUF (Hooking), 6:01. Quinn, BUF (Hooking), 11:08. Ostapchuk, OTT (Roughing), 17:06. Zucker, BUF (Hooking), 17:24.
Second Period–1, Buffalo, Cozens 9, 4:11. 1, Buffalo, McLeod 7 (Dahlin, Tuch), 10:22. Penalties–Gilbert, BUF (Holding), 18:05.
Third Period–None. Penalties–Cousins, OTT (Elbowing), 1:25. Gilbert, BUF (Fighting), 11:44. Gilbert, BUF (Unsportsmanlike conduct), 11:44. Tkachuk, OTT (Fighting), 11:44. Tkachuk, OTT (Roughing), 11:44. Tkachuk, OTT (Unsportsmanlike conduct), 11:44.
Shots on Goal–Buffalo 6-10-5–21. Ottawa 13-6-16–35.
Power-play opportunities–Buffalo 0 of 4; Ottawa 0 of 4.
Goalies–Buffalo, Luukkonen 13-12-4 (35 shots-35 saves). Ottawa, Forsberg 4-8-1 (21-17).
A–16,276 (19,153).

Tampa Bay 4, Boston 1

Boston	0	0	1	– 1
Tampa Bay	0	2	2	– 4

First Period–None. Penalties–Zacha, BOS (Tripping), 8:56. Zadorov, BOS (Slashing), 13:41.
Second Period–1, Tampa Bay, Cirelli 16 (Hagel, McDonagh), 14:07. 1, Tampa Bay, Eyssimont 4 (Paul, McDonagh), 19:10. Penalties–Zadorov, BOS (Holding), 5:49. Zacha, BOS (Embellishment), 7:47. Hagel, TBL (Interference), 7:47. Hedman, TBL (Interference), 13:16.
Third Period–1, Boston, Lohrei 2 (Peeke, Marchand), 2:05. 1, Tampa Bay, Hagel 19 (Kucherov, Cernak), 18:28. 1, Tampa Bay, Point 25 (Kucherov, Hedman), 19:24. Penalties–Lohrei, BOS (Holding), 19:17. Kastelic, BOS (Fighting), 19:57. Lilleberg, TBL (Cross checking Major), 19:57. Lilleberg, TBL (Game Misconduct), 19:57. Lilleberg, TBL (Fighting), 19:57. Brazeau, BOS (Roughing), 20:00. Brazeau, BOS (Misconduct), 20:00.
Shots on Goal–Boston 9-7-12–28. Tampa Bay 11-13-7–31.
Power-play opportunities–Boston 0 of 1; Tampa Bay 1 of 4.
Goalies–Boston, Swayman 13-15-3 (30 shots-27 saves). Tampa Bay, Vasilevskiy 18-12-1 (28-27).
A–19,092 (19,092).

Dallas 4, Philadelphia 1

Dallas	2	1	1	– 4
Philadelphia	0	0	1	– 1

First Period–1, Dallas, Bourque 3 (Dumba, Stankoven), 1:45. 1, Dallas, Hintz 19 (Dadonov, Robertson), 9:38. Penalties–Dumba, DAL (Hooking), 17:08.
Second Period–1, Dallas, Johnston 10 (Benn, Lundkvist), 8:41. Penalties–None.
Third Period–1, Philadelphia, Frost 8 (Konecny, Zamula), 6:47. 1, Dallas, Heiskanen 5 (Lindell, Robertson), 16:47. Penalties–Tippett, PHI (Tripping), 0:19. Dumba, DAL (Interference), 9:43.
Shots on Goal–Dallas 9-9-5–23. Philadelphia 9-8-11–28.
Power-play opportunities–Dallas 0 of 1; Philadelphia 0 of 2.
Goalies–Dallas, DeSmith 6-4-0 (28 shots-27 saves). Philadelphia, Ersson 9-7-2 (22-19).
A–17,941 (19,523).

St. Louis 6, Anaheim 2

Anaheim	1	1	0	– 2
St. Louis	4	2	0	– 6

First Period–1, St. Louis, Thomas 10, 2:45. 1, St. Louis, Tucker 1 (Sundqvist, Bolduc), 4:31. 1, St. Louis, Kyrou 19 (Fowler, Schenn), 6:40. 1, St. Louis, Holloway 15 (Kyrou, Schenn), 13:55. 1, Anaheim, Nesterenko 1 (LaCombe), 16:00. Penalties–Gauthier, ANA (Cross-checking), 8:20.
Second Period–2, St. Louis, Thomas 11 (Buchnevich), 4:45. 1, St. Louis, Buchnevich 11 (Saad, Suter), 8:02. 1, Anaheim, Colangelo 1 (Strome, Gudas), 14:38. Penalties–Walker, STL (Hooking), 15:28. McTavish, ANA (Roughing), 17:44. Tucker, STL (Roughing), 17:44.
Third Period–None. Penalties–Thomas, STL (Interference), 17:54.
Shots on Goal–Anaheim 8-8-7–23. St. Louis 16-10-8–34.
Power-play opportunities–Anaheim 0 of 2; St. Louis 0 of 1.
Goalies–Anaheim, Dostal 10-12-3 (22 shots-16 saves), Gibson (12-12). St. Louis, Hofer 9-4-1 (23-21).
A–17,176 (19,150).

N.Y. Islanders 4, Vegas 0

N.Y. Islanders	1	2	1	– 4
Vegas	0	0	0	– 0

First Period–1, N.Y. Islanders, Lee 19 (Nelson), 17:04. Penalties–Mayfield, NYI (Hooking), 12:46.
Second Period–1, N.Y. Islanders, Nelson 11 (Barzal, Romanov), 5:30. 1, N.Y. Islanders, Horvat 13 (Palmieri, Romanov), 10:41. Penalties–None.
Third Period–1, N.Y. Islanders, Cizikas 4 (Pageau, Dobson), 17:26. Penalties–Olofsson, VGK (Hooking), 9:13.
Shots on Goal–N.Y. Islanders 6-6-9–21. Vegas 8-11-11–30.
Power-play opportunities–N.Y. Islanders 0 of 1; Vegas 0 of 1.
Goalies–N.Y. Islanders, Sorokin 13-13-4 (30 shots-30 saves). Vegas, Hill 17-7-2 (20-17).
A–17,713 (17,368).

TENNIS ROUNDUP

American Pegula reaches semifinals in Adelaide

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Jessica Pegula hits a return to Ashlyn Krueger during the quarterfinals of the Adelaide International Thursday in Australia. SARAH REED/GETTY IMAGES

Top-seeded Jessica Pegula cruised into the semifinals of the Adelaide International after Ashlyn Krueger was forced to retire due to a right thigh injury on Thursday in Australia.

Pegula was ahead 6-4, 2-0 when Krueger called for the trainer. Krueger opted to call it a day, ending the match after 49 minutes.

Pegula advances to face Russian-born Kazakhstani Yulia Putintseva, who posted a marathon 7-6 (3), 6-7 (9), 6-4 win over sixth-seeded Russian Diana Shnaider. Putintseva won 74.5 percent of her first serves and took advantage of five double faults to secure the match in 3 hours, 14 minutes.

Also on Thursday, Madison Keys cruised to a 6-1, 6-3 win over third-seeded Russian Daria Kasatkina in 57 minutes. She will face Russian Liudmila Samsonova, who notched a 6-4, 6-4 upset of No. 2 seed Emma Navarro.

Hobart International

McCartney Kessler recorded three aces in a 7-5, 6-4 win over top-seeded Dayana Yastremska of the Ukraine in their quarterfinal match in Australia.

Kessler benefited from 11 double faults to dispatch Yastremska in 94 minutes. She will take on No. 6 Elina Avanesyan, who received a walkover victory against third-seeded Amanda Anisimova (illness).

No. 2 seed Elise Mertens of Belgium pulled out a 6-1, 0-6, 6-2 win over Russia's Veronika Kudermetova. Up next is Australian wild card Maya Joint, who breezed to a 6-3, 6-1 win over Sofia Kenin in 62 minutes.

Men
ASB Classic

American teen Nishesh Basavareddy defeated countryman and No. 8 seed Alex Michelsen 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the ASB Classic in Auckland, New Zealand.

At 19, Basavareddy became the youngest U.S. male to reach a tour-level semifinal on a hard court since Reilly Opelka did so at 18 in Atlanta in 2016. He saved five of seven break points in the 1-hour, 42-minute victory to set up a clash with unseeded Frenchman Gael Monfils.

The other semifinal pits No. 7 seed Nuno Borges of Portugal against Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs. Borges outlasted 19-year-old Jakub Mensik of the Czech Republic 6-7 (4), 6-2, 7-6 (4) and Bergs rallied for a 1-6, 6-2, 6-3 victory over Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena.

Adelaide International

Top-seeded Tommy Paul took down home favorite Rinky Hijikata 6-3, 6-4 in 79 minutes to advance to the semifinals in Australia.

Paul fired eight aces and saved all four break points. Up next is No. 5 seed Felix Auger-Aliassime, who hammered 11 aces in a 7-6 (3), 6-3 victory against Marcos Giron.

No. 2 seed Sebastian Korda moved into the semifinals with a walkover win against Aussie Thanasi Kokkinakis, who withdrew with a right shoulder injury on the eve of the Australian Open. Korda will face Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia after his 6-2, 6-3 defeat of Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi in 64 minutes.

TENNIS AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Novak Djokovic, left, greets Carlos Alcaraz after winning the men's singles gold medal match at the Paris 2024 Olympics AMBER SEARLS/USA TODAY SPORTS

Djokovic, Alcaraz could meet in men's semifinals

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

The Australian Open draws were revealed on Thursday, and Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz could meet in the quarterfinals on the men's side while women's World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka will face Sloane Stephens in the first round.

Djokovic, the 10-time Australian Open champion from Serbia, is the No. 7 seed and was placed in the same quadrant of the bracket as No. 3 seed Alcaraz of Spain.

Alcaraz, 21, has captured four major titles in his young career but needs the Australian Open to complete the career Grand Slam. He opens against Alexander Shevchenko of Kazakhstan while Djokovic will play American wild card Nishesh Basavareddy.

World No. 1 and defending champ Jannik Sinner of Italy opens against Chile's Nicole Jarry. The 2024 Australian Open was the site of Sinner's first Grand Slam breakthrough before he added to his total by winning the U.S. Open.

No. 2 seed Alexander Zverev of Germany faces Frenchman Lucas Pouille, a onetime Aussie Open semifinalist (2019), in the opening round. The fourth seed is Taylor Fritz, who draws Jenson Brooksby in an all-American first-round affair.

As for Sabalenka, the Belarusian has won each of the past two Australian Opens but may not face an easy path to a third. Her quarterfinal opponent could be No. 5 seed Qinwen Zheng of China, who won the Olympic gold medal in women's singles last summer in Paris.

No. 2 seed Iga Swiatek of Poland faces Czech Republic's Katerina Siniakova to start. One of the potential challenges in her quadrant of the bracket is No. 21 seed Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, who prevailed in Melbourne in 2012 and 2013.

Coco Gauff is the No. 3 seed but faces a potentially tough match in the first round against fellow American Sofia Kenin, the 2020 Australian Open champ.

Three other Americans with high seeds are No. 5 Jessica Pegula, No. 8 Emma Navarro and No. 10 Danielle Collins. Collins lost to Australia's Ash Barty in the 2022 championship match.

Tom Hoge plays his shot from the 17th tee during the first round of the Sony Open on Thursday in Honolulu. MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

Sony Open

Continued from Page 1

Hall added of his strategy at Waialae, "If you have confidence in the driver, then it really makes a big difference. It's quite a tight golf course, so if you can hit a driver straight, then you're obviously gaining a few strokes on the field, and that's exactly what I did."

Hoge's round included a pair of eagles – at the par-5 ninth hole and the par-4 14th hole – plus two birdies and no bogeys. It was the fifth time that Hoge registered two eagles in a PGA Tour round. At No. 14, he knocked in a 189-yard shot.

"It's funny, my caddie James started with me in Maui last year, and he's been giving me a hard time because I hadn't holed a shot from the fairway with him at all," Hoge said.

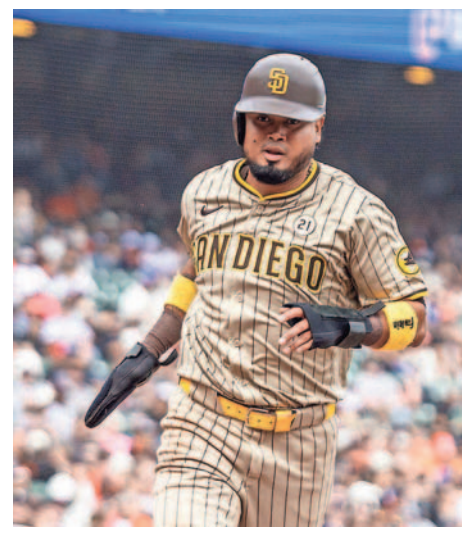
"I feel like I'm a pretty good wedge player, short iron player, so I've certainly had plenty of opportunities and haven't made one. He's been on me for that, and for that one to be the one that goes in was pretty funny."

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, who broke the PGA Tour's scoring record in relation to par last week while winning The Sentry, is tied for 26th place at 67. Matsuyama won the Sony Open in 2022.

MLB NOTEBOOK

Report: Arraez, Padres settle at $14M for 2025

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA



The San Diego Padres' Luis Arraez scores against the Giants during a Sept. 15 game in San Francisco. BOB KUPBENS/IMAGN IMAGES

Three-time batting champion Luis Arraez agreed to a $14 million salary for the 2025 season with the San Diego Padres, MLB.com reported on Thursday.

The report comes on the same day as the 1 p.m. ET deadline for unsigned arbitration-eligible players and teams to exchange figures. The Padres have yet to confirm the report.

Arraez, 27, batted .314 last season while winning his third consecutive batting title. The three-time All-Star infielder was the first person to win three straight titles with three different teams — he won the American League crown in 2022 with the Minnesota Twins and the National League title with the Miami Marlins in 2023.

Report: Yankees done adding big-ticket free agents for 2025

The American League champion New York Yankees appear to have completed their offseason shopping spree and no longer are in the market for big-name, high-dollar free agents, Sportico reported.

The Yankees already have made some significant additions to the roster, signing left-hander Max Fried to an eight-year, $218 million deal and adding first baseman Paul Goldschmidt to a one-year, $12.5 million deal.

Not only was outfielder/first baseman Cody Bellinger acquired from the Chicago Cubs, and set to make $25 million in 2025, right-hander Devin Williams was acquired from the Milwaukee Brewers ($8.4 million). The club also re-signed right-hander Jonathan Loaisiga ($5 million).

The Yankees have $270.6 million committed to 13 players so far for the upcoming season, second only to the champion Los Angeles Dodgers, who have $336 million committed to 19 players.

Dodgers reach deals with RHPs Graterol, Kopech

The World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers locked in a pair of key right-handed relievers for 2025, coming to terms on one-year deals with Michael Kopech and Brusdar Graterol.

Graterol agreed to a $2.8 million deal, according to The Athletic, while Kopech agreed to a $5.2 million contract, according to multiple outlets. Both deals avoided arbitration.

The Dodgers still have deals pending to avoid arbitration with three other key pieces of the bullpen: left-handers Anthony Banda and Alex Vesia, and right-hander Evan Philips.

White Sox avoid arbitration with 1B Vaughn, 3 others

The Chicago White Sox avoided arbitration by agreeing to terms with four players on one-year contracts.

First baseman Andrew Vaughn signed for $5.85 million, while right-handers Steven Wilson ($950,000), Justin Anderson ($900,000) and Penn Murfee ($780,00) also remain in the fold, the White Sox announced.

The White Sox, who are coming off a historically bad 2024 campaign (41-121), have agreed to terms with all arbitration-eligible players for 2025.

SCOREBOARD

BETTING LINE

NFL

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
LA Chargers	3	42.5	HOUSTON
BALTIMORE	10	43.5	Pittsburgh

Sunday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
BUFFALO	8.5	47	Denver
PHILADELPHIA	4.5	45.5	Green Bay
TAMPA BAY	3	50.5	Washington

Monday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Minnesota	1.5	47	LA RAMS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Friday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Ohio State	6	53.5	TEXAS

All times Eastern

NFL

Playoffs

Saturday's Games

L.A. Chargers at Houston, 4:30 p.m., CBS
Pittsburgh at Baltimore, 8 p.m., Amazon

Sunday, Jan. 12

Denver at Buffalo, 1 p.m., CBS
Green Bay at Philadelphia, 4:30 p.m., Fox
Washington at Tampa Bay, 8 p.m., NBC

Monday, Jan. 13

Minnesota at L.A. Rams, 8 p.m., ESPN/ABC

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	27	10	.730	–
N.Y. Knicks	25	13	.658	2½
Philadelphia	15	20	.429	11
Brooklyn	13	24	.351	14
Toronto	8	30	.211	19½

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	22	17	.564	–
Miami	19	17	.528	1½
Atlanta	19	19	.500	2½
Charlotte	8	27	.229	12
Washington	6	29	.171	14

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	33	4	.892	–
Milwaukee	19	16	.543	13
Indiana	20	18	.526	13½
Detroit	19	19	.500	14½
Chicago	17	20	.459	16

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	25	12	.676	–
Memphis	24	14	.632	1½
Dallas	22	16	.579	3½
San Antonio	18	19	.486	7
New Orleans	7	31	.184	18½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	30	6	.833	–
Denver	21	15	.583	9
Minnesota	20	17	.541	10½
Portland	13	24	.351	17½
Utah	9	27	.250	21

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	20	16	.556	–
L.A. Clippers	20	17	.541	½
Golden State	19	18	.514	1½
Sacramento	18	19	.486	2½
Phoenix	17	19	.472	3

Tuesday's Scores

Charlotte 115, Phoenix 104
Houston 135, Washington 112
Dallas 118, L.A. Lakers 97
Minnesota 104, New Orleans 97
Atlanta 124, Utah 121
Boston 118, Denver 106
Miami 114, Golden State 98

Wednesday's Scores

Cleveland 129, Oklahoma City 122
Indiana 129, Chicago 113
Philadelphia 109, Washington 103
Detroit 113, Brooklyn 98
N.Y. Knicks 112, Toronto 98
Portland 119, New Orleans 100
Denver 126, L.A. Clippers 103
Milwaukee 121, San Antonio 105

Thursday's Scores

Cleveland 132, Toronto 126
Golden State 107, Detroit 104
Minnesota 104, Orlando 89
Dallas 117, Portland 111
Houston 119, Memphis 115
Miami 97, Utah 92
Phoenix 123, Atlanta 115
Charlotte at L.A. Lakers, ppd.

Friday's Games

Golden State at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Milwaukee at Orlando, 7 p.m.
New Orleans at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Sacramento at Boston, 7:30 p.m.
Oklahoma City at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
Washington at Chicago, 8 p.m.
Brooklyn at Denver, 9 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Houston at Atlanta, 3 p.m.
Utah at Phoenix, 5 p.m.
Toronto at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Memphis at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Miami at Portland, 10 p.m.
Charlotte at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.
San Antonio at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Denver at Dallas, 3 p.m.
Milwaukee at N.Y. Knicks, 3 p.m.
Sacramento at Chicago, 3:30 p.m.
New Orleans at Boston, 6 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Washington, 6 p.m.
Indiana at Cleveland, 6 p.m.
Philadelphia at Orlando, 6 p.m.
Brooklyn at Utah, 8 p.m.
Charlotte at Phoenix, 9 p.m.

Monday's Games

Minnesota at Washington, 7 p.m.
Golden State at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.
Detroit at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
Memphis at Houston, 8 p.m.
Miami at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.
San Antonio at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.

League Leaders

Scoring Averages

	GP	PTS	AVG
Antetokounmpo, MIL	28	884	31.6
Jokic, DEN	31	977	31.5
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	35	1095	31.3
Tatum, BOS	34	957	28.2
Durant, PHX	25	684	27.4
Fox, SAC	35	933	26.7
Davis, LAL	34	878	25.8
Edwards, MIN	36	929	25.8
Wembanyama, SAS	31	794	25.6
Maxey, PHI	28	711	25.4
Brunson, NYK	36	912	25.3
Towns, NYK	34	859	25.3
Lillard, MIL	27	668	24.7
Booker, PHX	30	737	24.6
Cunningham, DET	32	780	24.4
Irving, DAL	30	729	24.3
Brown, BOS	30	718	23.9
James, LAL	33	787	23.9
Herro, MIA	35	825	23.6
Powell, LAC	29	682	23.5

Field-Goal Percentage

	FG	FGA	PCT
Gafford, DAL	168	234	.718
Kessler, UTA	133	187	.711
Allen, CLE	199	286	.696
Duren, DET	132	192	.688
Gobert, MIN	139	224	.621
Zubac, LAC	245	398	.616
Poeltl, TOR	203	335	.606
Antetokounmpo, MIL	349	580	.602
Sabonis, SAC	276	466	.592
Capela, ATL	160	273	.586
Jackson-Davis, GSW	132	226	.584
Mobley, CLE	240	420	.571
Ayton, POR	174	306	.569
Thompson, HOU	166	293	.567
Hart, NYK	193	343	.563
Wagner, ORL	140	249	.562
Valanciunas, WAS	166	298	.557
Jokic, DEN	372	672	.554
Braun, DEN	181	327	.554
Vucevic, CHI	291	526	.553

Free-Throw Percentage

	FT	FTA	PCT
Curry, GSW	91	98	.929
Embiid, PHI	103	112	.920
Garland, CLE	97	106	.915
Lillard, MIL	169	185	.914
Simons, POR	81	89	.910
Murphy III, NOP	79	87	.908
Valanciunas, WAS	68	75	.907
Suggs, ORL	97	107	.907
Rozier, MIA	55	61	.902
Sexton, UTA	108	120	.900
Irving, DAL	98	109	.899
Johnson, BKN	111	124	.895
Dick, TOR	92	103	.893
Booker, PHX	191	214	.893
White, CHI	97	109	.890
Markkanen, UTA	128	144	.889
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	247	278	.888
Miller, CHA	63	71	.887
Brogdon, WAS	62	70	.886
Monk, SAC	77	87	.885

3-Point Field-Goal Percentage

	3FG	3FGA	PCT
Jokic, DEN	71	149	.477
Kennard, MEM	48	106	.453
Green, MIL	76	169	.450
LaVine, CHI	102	228	.447
LeVert, CLE	51	114	.447
Prince, MIL	57	128	.445
Coffey, LAC	61	137	.445
Irving, DAL	93	211	.441
O'Neale, PHX	78	177	.441
Towns, NYK	73	166	.440
Hunter, ATL	72	164	.439
Powell, LAC	103	235	.438
Collins, UTA	39	89	.438
Johnson, BKN	105	241	.436
Finney-Smith, LAL	55	127	.433
Alexander-Walker, MIN	61	141	.433
Sexton, UTA	70	162	.432
Battle, TOR	44	102	.431
Garland, CLE	100	232	.431
Edwards, MIN	154	359	.429

Rebounds Per Game

	GP	OFF	DEF	TOT	AVG
Towns, NYK	34	102	375	477	14.0
Sabonis, SAC	34	130	339	469	13.8
Jokic, DEN	31	108	296	404	13.0
Zubac, LAC	36	139	317	456	12.7
Davis, LAL	34	89	314	403	11.9
Antetokounmpo, MIL	28	56	270	326	11.6
Kessler, UTA	29	123	203	326	11.2
Wembanyama, SAS	31	56	279	335	10.8
Gobert, MIN	36	124	259	383	10.6
Poeltl, TOR	31	115	213	328	10.6
Sengun, HOU	36	121	255	376	10.4
Johnson, ATL	32	59	266	325	10.2
Ayton, POR	26	73	191	264	10.2
Vucevic, CHI	35	79	276	355	10.1
Allen, CLE	35	84	269	353	10.1
Adebayo, MIA	35	83	261	344	9.8
Duren, DET	33	109	200	309	9.4
Tatum, BOS	34	21	293	314	9.2
Nurkic, PHX	25	46	183	229	9.2
Hart, NYK	36	67	259	326	9.1

Assists Per Game

	GP	AST	AVG
Young, ATL	35	427	12.2
Jokic, DEN	31	301	9.7
Cunningham, DET	32	303	9.5
James, LAL	33	292	8.9
Haliburton, IND	37	325	8.8
Paul, SAS	36	301	8.4
Harden, LAC	34	271	8.0
Brunson, NYK	36	273	7.6
Lillard, MIL	27	198	7.3
Simmons, BKN	26	179	6.9
Booker, PHX	30	204	6.8
Giddey, CHI	32	216	6.8
Garland, CLE	34	226	6.7
Westbrook, DEN	35	232	6.6
Sabonis, SAC	34	214	6.3
Murray, DEN	29	179	6.2
Fox, SAC	35	216	6.2
Barrett, TOR	28	172	6.1
Antetokounmpo, MIL	28	171	6.1
Jones, PHX	34	207	6.1

Steals Per Game

	GP	STL	AVG
Daniels, ATL	33	103	3.12
Maxey, PHI	28	58	2.07
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	35	68	1.94
George, PHI	24	44	1.83
Wallace, OKC	34	61	1.79
Williams, OKC	35	62	1.77
Westbrook, DEN	35	60	1.71
Jokic, DEN	31	53	1.71
Caldwell-Pope, ORL	37	61	1.65
Poole, WAS	28	46	1.64
Fox, SAC	35	57	1.63
Murray, DEN	29	47	1.62
Dunn, LAC	36	58	1.61
VanVleet, HOU	34	53	1.56
Adebayo, MIA	35	53	1.51
Johnson, ATL	32	48	1.50
Harden, LAC	34	51	1.50
Jackson Jr., MEM	35	52	1.49
Suggs, ORL	34	50	1.47
Mitchell, CLE	34	50	1.47

Blocks Per Game

	GP	BLK	Avg.
Wembanyama, SAS	31	124	4.00
Kessler, UTA	29	74	2.55
Davis, LAL	34	73	2.15
Turner, IND	35	73	2.09
Lopez, MIL	34	64	1.88
Lively II, DAL	29	49	1.69
Bitadze, ORL	33	54	1.64
Jackson Jr., MEM	35	57	1.63
Sarr, WAS	31	49	1.58
Clingan, POR	28	43	1.54
Gobert, MIN	36	55	1.53
Mobley, CLE	33	50	1.52
Antetokounmpo, MIL	28	41	1.46
Missi, NOP	36	51	1.42
Gafford, DAL	35	49	1.40
Poeltl, TOR	31	40	1.29
Isaac, ORL	32	41	1.28
Durant, PHX	25	32	1.28
Stewart, DET	32	40	1.25
White, BOS	35	43	1.23

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	27	14	2	56	135	121
Florida	25	15	2	52	140	128
Tampa Bay	22	15	2	46	144	108
Boston	20	19	5	45	112	139
Ottawa	19	18	3	41	114	118
Montreal	19	18	3	41	122	136
Detroit	18	18	4	40	110	128
Buffalo	16	21	5	37	130	140

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	27	10	4	58	150	109
New Jersey	25	15	4	54	139	112
Carolina	25	15	2	52	143	120
Columbus	19	17	6	44	147	150
Pittsburgh	18	17	8	44	133	159
N.Y. Rangers	19	20	2	40	120	130
N.Y. Islanders	16	18	7	39	112	128
Philadelphia	17	20	5	39	126	151

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	28	12	2	58	152	106
Minnesota	26	12	4	56	128	117
Dallas	26	13	1	53	132	100
Colorado	26	16	1	53	147	135
St. Louis	20	19	4	44	124	131
Utah	17	16	7	41	114	122
Nashville	13	21	7	33	100	128
Chicago	14	25	2	30	105	138

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	28	10	3	59	143	111
Edmonton	25	13	3	53	135	114
L.A. Kings	23	10	5	51	118	96
Vancouver	18	12	10	46	121	128
Calgary	19	14	7	45	108	122
Anaheim	17	19	5	39	105	127
Seattle	17	22	3	37	120	136
San Jose	13	24	6	32	112	153

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Tuesday's Scores

Edmonton 4, Boston 0
Detroit 3, Ottawa 2, OT
Dallas 5, N.Y. Rangers 4, OT
Columbus 4, Pittsburgh 3, SO
Tampa Bay 3, Carolina 2
Toronto 3, Philadelphia 2
Minnesota 6, St. Louis 4
Winnipeg 5, Nashville 2
Calgary 3, Anaheim 2, OT
Vegas 4, San Jose 2

Wednesday's Scores

Washington 2, Vancouver 1, OT
Chicago 3, Colorado 1
Florida 4, Utah 1
Calgary at L.A. Kings, ppd.

Thursday's Scores

Buffalo 4, Ottawa 0
Tampa Bay 4, Boston 1
N.Y. Rangers 3, New Jersey 2, OT
Dallas 4, Philadelphia 1
Pittsburgh 5, Edmonton 3
Columbus 6, Seattle 2
Carolina 6, Toronto 3
St. Louis 6, Anaheim 2
Colorado 6, Minnesota 1
N.Y. Islanders 4, Vegas 0

Friday's Games

Chicago at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Montreal at Washington, 7 p.m.
Vancouver at Carolina, 7 p.m.
L.A. Kings at Winnipeg, 8 p.m.
San Jose at Utah, 9 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Boston at Florida, 1 p.m.
Seattle at Buffalo, 4 p.m.
Ottawa at Pittsburgh, 4 p.m.
Vancouver at Toronto, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Montreal, 7 p.m.
Tampa Bay at New Jersey, 7 p.m.
Anaheim at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Edmonton at Chicago, 7 p.m.
Columbus at St. Louis, 7 p.m.
Colorado at Winnipeg, 7 p.m.
Washington at Nashville, 8 p.m.
N.Y. Islanders at Utah, 9 p.m.
L.A. Kings at Calgary, 10 p.m.
N.Y. Rangers at Vegas, 10 p.m.
Minnesota at San Jose, 10 p.m.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

College Football Playoff Matchups

Semifinals

Thursday

Capital One Orange Bowl

Notre Dame 27, Penn State 24

Friday

Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic

Ohio State vs Texas at Arlington, 7:30 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 20

CFP National Championship

at Atlanta, 7:30 p.m.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Thursday's Men's Scores

East

Purdue 68, Rutgers 50
Maine 82, Binghamton 71
Vermont 67, UMass Lowell 63
Towson 80, Northeastern 73
Campbell 66, Hampton 55
Charleston 67, Hofstra 61
William & Mary 78, Elon 65
Marshall 80, James Madison 78
Delaware 98, North Carolina A&T 88
UNCW 64, Monmouth 55
UMBC 87, NJIT 64
Albany 61, New Hampshire 57
Drexel 67, Stony Brook 51

Southeast

Morehead State 59, Little Rock 53
UNCG 78, Chattanooga 75
Jacksonville 74, Bellarmine 59
FGCU 75, North Alabama 70
Stetson 75, Central Arkansas 65
Eastern Kentucky 79, North Florida 74
Texas State 74, Troy 73
Louisiana Tech 81, FIU 64
Middle Tennessee 84, Kennesaw State 79
West Georgia 72, Austin Peay 68
Queens University 75, Lipscomb 73
Old Dominion 71, Louisiana 60
Samford 81, VMI 68
Jacksonville State 73, Western Kentucky 67
Southern Miss 84, ULM 67
South Alabama 76, Arkansas State 62

Midwest

Oregon 73, Ohio State 71
IU Indianapolis 95, Detroit 61
Wright State 66, Oakland 62
Michigan State 88, Washington 54
Tennessee Tech 69, Eastern Illinois 64
Lindenwood 72, Tennessee State 62
Southeast Missouri State 77, Southern Indiana 66
UT Martin 85, Western Illinois 83

West

North Dakota State 110, Oral Roberts 96
Utah Valley 72, Grand Canyon 64
Tarleton St. 74, Southern Utah 66
North Dakota 95, Denver 70
Northern Colorado 83, Montana State 82
UC Davis 63, Cal State Fullerton 53
Utah Tech 74, UT Arlington 62
Montana 81, Northern Arizona 76
Liberty 76, Sam Houston 68
Pacific 95, Washington State 94
Portland State 64, Eastern Washington 59
Idaho 80, Sacramento State 67
San Francisco 81, Portland 72
Santa Clara 82, Oregon State 81
UC Santa Barbara 78, Bakersfield 66
UC Irvine 77, CSUN 67
Hawaii 83, UC Riverside 76
UC San Diego 95, Cal Poly 68

Friday, Jan. 10

East

Merrimack at Sacred Heart, 11 a.m.
Kent State at Buffalo, 6 p.m.
Saint Peter's at Niagara, 6:30 p.m.
Rider at Canisius, 7 p.m.
Iona at Fairfield, 7 p.m.
FDU at Le Moyne, 7 p.m.
Mount St. Mary's at Manhattan, 7 p.m.
Siena at Quinnipiac, 7 p.m.
Mercyhurst at Saint Francis U, 7 p.m.
LIU at Stonehill, 7 p.m.
Wagner at Central Connecticut State, 7 p.m.
UCLA at Maryland, 8 p.m.

Midwest

Minnesota at Wisconsin, 7 p.m.
Central Michigan at Toledo, 8 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 11

East

Brown at Yale, noon
Notre Dame at Duke, noon
Louisville at Pittsburgh, noon
La Salle at St. Bonaventure, noon
UNCW at Hofstra, 1 p.m.
Charleston at Monmouth, 1 p.m.
James Madison at App State, 1 p.m.
Binghamton at New Hampshire, 1 p.m.
NJIT at UMass Lowell, 1 p.m.
Holy Cross at Lafayette, 1 p.m.
Princeton at Harvard, 2 p.m.
Delaware at Hampton, 2 p.m.
Towson at Drexel, 2 p.m.
North Carolina A&T at William & Mary, 2 p.m.
Cornell at Columbia, 2 p.m.
Albany vs Maine at Orono, 2 p.m.
Massachusetts at George Mason, 2 p.m.

Southeast

Wofford vs Furman at Greenville, noon
Auburn at South Carolina, 1 p.m.
Central Arkansas at FGCU, 2 p.m.
VMI at Chattanooga, 2 p.m.
East Texas A&M at Northwestern State, 2 p.m.
Florida State at Clemson, 2 p.m.

Midwest

USC at Illinois, noon
Creighton at Butler, noon
Northern Illinois at Ohio, 1 p.m.
Belmont at Indiana State, 1 p.m.
South Dakota State at Omaha, 2 p.m.
Cleveland State at Youngstown State, 2 p.m.
Bowling Green at Ball State, 2 p.m.

West

San Diego State at New Mexico, 1 p.m.

USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll

Jan. 6

The USA TODAY Sports Men's Basketball Coaches Poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen in consultation with the National Association of Basketball Coaches. The voters represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

Others receiving votes: Baylor 49; Cincinnati 38; Pittsburgh 32; San Diego State 25; St. John's 24; Clemson 10; Maryland 9; Georgia 5; Nebraska 4; Arizona 4; Wisconsin 3; Vanderbilt 3; Indiana 3; UC San Diego 1; Texas Tech 1; Arkansas 1.

USA TODAY Sports Women's Coaches Poll

Jan. 7

The USA TODAY Sports women's basketball coaches poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. The members represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. UCLA (31)	15-0	775	1
2. S. Carolina	14-1	741	2
3. Notre Dame	12-2	694	3
4. LSU	17-0	659	4
5. USC	14-1	654	5
6. Texas	15-1	630	6
7. Maryland	14-0	590	7
8. UConn	13-2	550	8
9. Ohio State	14-0	534	9
10. Kansas St.	15-1	480	11
11. Oklahoma	13-2	448	10
12. TCU	15-1	444	12
13. Georgia Tech	15-0	405	14
14. Duke	12-3	347	15
15. Tennessee	13-1	341	13
16. Kentucky	13-1	317	16
17. West Virginia	12-2	263	18
18. N. Carolina	13-3	230	17
19. NC State	11-3	215	19
19. Alabama	15-1	215	20
21. Michigan St.	12-2	163	21
22. Utah	12-2	86	NR
23. Iowa	12-3	82	22
24. Florida St.	13-2	58	NR
25. California	14-2	43	23

Others receiving votes: Baylor 34; Ole Miss 20; Vanderbilt 16; Minnesota 11; Michigan 9; Saint Joseph's 8; South Dakota State 5; Harvard 2; Creighton 2; Seton Hall 1; Nebraska 1; George Mason 1; FGCU 1.

GOLF

Sony Open in Hawaii
Thursday
Honolulu
Waialae Country Club
Purse: $8.7 million
Yardage: 7,044; Par: 70
First Round - Suspended

Eric Cole ..... 64–64 (-6)
Harry Hall ..... 64–64 (-6)
Tom Hoge ..... 64–64 (-6)
Denny McCarthy ..... 64–64 (-6)
Paul Peterson ..... 64–64 (-6)
Adam Schenk ..... 64–64 (-6)
Patrick Fishburn ..... 65–65 (-5)
Ben Griffin ..... 65–65 (-5)
Adam Hadwin ..... 65–65 (-5)
Ben Kohles ..... 65–65 (-5)
Henrik Norlander ..... 65–65 (-5)
Sam Ryder ..... 65–65 (-5)
Nico Echavarria ..... 66–66 (-4)
Brice Garnett ..... 66–66 (-4)
James Hahn ..... 66–66 (-4)
Brian Harman ..... 66–66 (-4)
Russell Henley ..... 66–66 (-4)
Zach Johnson ..... 66–66 (-4)
Chan Kim ..... 66–66 (-4)
Andrew Putnam ..... 66–66 (-4)
Webb Simpson ..... 66–66 (-4)
J.J. Spaun ..... 66–66 (-4)
Sepp Straka ..... 66–66 (-4)
Jackson Suber ..... 66–66 (-4)
Nick Taylor ..... 66–66 (-4)
Jacob Bridgeman ..... 67–67 (-3)
Brian Campbell ..... 67–67 (-3)
Rafael Campos ..... 67–67 (-3)
Cam Davis ..... 67–67 (-3)
Thomas Detry ..... 67–67 (-3)
Lucas Glover ..... 67–67 (-3)
Matt Kuchar ..... 67–67 (-3)
Nate Lashley ..... 67–67 (-3)
Tyler Loree ..... 67–67 (-3)
Ben Martin ..... 67–67 (-3)
Hideki Matsuyama ..... 67–67 (-3)
Mac Meissner ..... 67–67 (-3)
Andrew Novak ..... 67–67 (-3)
J.T. Poston ..... 67–67 (-3)
Kevin Roy ..... 67–67 (-3)
Greyson Sigg ..... 67–67 (-3)
Jesper Svensson ..... 67–67 (-3)
Sahith Theegala ..... 67–67 (-3)
Bud Cauley ..... 68–68 (-2)
Nick Dunlap ..... 68–68 (-2)
Austin Eckroat ..... 68–68 (-2)
Ryan Gerard ..... 68–68 (-2)
Doug Ghim ..... 68–68 (-2)
Emiliano Grillo ..... 68–68 (-2)
Lee Hodges ..... 68–68 (-2)
Mark Hubbard ..... 68–68 (-2)
Stephan Jaeger ..... 68–68 (-2)
Tom Kim ..... 68–68 (-2)
David Lipsky ..... 68–68 (-2)
Justin Lower ..... 68–68 (-2)
Robert MacIntyre ..... 68–68 (-2)
Patrick Rodgers ..... 68–68 (-2)
Thomas Rosenmueller ..... 68–68 (-2)
Matthias Schmid ..... 68–68 (-2)
Alex Smalley ..... 68–68 (-2)
Brandt Snedeker ..... 68–68 (-2)
Gary Woodland ..... 68–68 (-2)
Cristobal Del Solar ..... 63–63 (-2)
Daniel Berger ..... 69–69 (-1)
Keegan Bradley ..... 69–69 (-1)
Luke Clanton ..... 69–69 (-1)
Taylor Dickson ..... 69–69 (-1)
Harris English ..... 69–69 (-1)
Ryo Hisatsune ..... 69–69 (-1)
Rico Hoey ..... 69–69 (-1)
Patton Kizzire ..... 69–69 (-1)
Matt McCarty ..... 69–69 (-1)
Maverick McNealy ..... 69–69 (-1)
Taylor Montgomery ..... 69–69 (-1)
Ryan Palmer ..... 69–69 (-1)
Taylor Pendrith ..... 69–69 (-1)
Ben Silverman ..... 69–69 (-1)
Sam Stevens ..... 69–69 (-1)
Kevin Streelman ..... 69–69 (-1)
Erik van Rooyen ..... 69–69 (-1)
Danny Walker ..... 69–69 (-1)
Vince Whaley ..... 69–69 (-1)
Carson Young ..... 69–69 (-1)
RJ Manke ..... 64–64 (-1)
Noah Goodwin ..... 57–57 (-1)
Kensei Hirata ..... 57–57 (-1)
Aaron Baddeley 70–70 (0)
Frankie Capan 70–70 (0)
Joel Dahmen 70–70 (0)
Will Gordon 70–70 (0)
Rikuya Hoshino 70–70 (0)
Takumi Kanaya 70–70 (0)
Kurt Kitayama 70–70 (0)
Max McGreevy 70–70 (0)
Keith Mitchell 70–70 (0)
C.T. Pan 70–70 (0)
Jeremy Paul 70–70 (0)
Chad Ramey 70–70 (0)
David Skinns 70–70 (0)
Adam Svensson 70–70 (0)
Davis Thompson 70–70 (0)
Braden Thornberry 70–70 (0)
Brendon Todd 70–70 (0)
Camilo Villegas 70–70 (0)
Gavin Cohen 65–65 (0)
William Mouw 65–65 (0)
Mason Andersen 71–71 (1)
Chris Gotterup 71–71 (1)
Nick Hardy 71–71 (1)
Joe Highsmith 71–71 (1)
Charley Hoffman 71–71 (1)
Billy Horschel 71–71 (1)
Si Woo Kim 71–71 (1)
Chris Kirk 71–71 (1)
Luke List 71–71 (1)
Vincent Norrman 71–71 (1)
Ben Polland 71–71 (1)
Kris Ventura 71–71 (1)
Trevor Cone 66–66 (1)
John Pak 66–66 (1)
Byeong Hun An 72–72 (2)
Corey Conners 72–72 (2)
Taylor Moore 72–72 (2)
Kaito Onishi 72–72 (2)
Chandler Phillips 72–72 (2)
Kevin Velo 72–72 (2)
Isaiah Salinda 67–67 (2)
Steven Fisk 60–60 (2)
Quade Cummins 73–73 (3)
Lanto Griffin 73–73 (3)
Mackenzie Hughes 73–73 (3)
Michael Kim 73–73 (3)
Kyoung-Hoon Lee 73–73 (3)
Aldrich Potgieter 73–73 (3)
Seamus Power 73–73 (3)
Yuta Sugiura 73–73 (3)
Alejandro Tosti 73–73 (3)
Ricky Castillo 68–68 (3)
Harry Higgs 74–74 (4)
Tim Widing 74–74 (4)
Peter Malnati 77–77 (7)
Mao Matsuyama 72–72 (7)
Kelly Welsh 81–81 (11)

PGA Tour Schedule

Jan. 9-12 – Sony Open in Hawaii, Honolulu
Jan. 16-19 – The American Express, La Quinta, Calif.
Jan. 22-25 – Farmers Insurance Open, La Jolla, Calif.
Jan. 30-Feb. 2 – AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, Pebble Beach, Calif.
Feb. 6-9 – WM Phoenix Open, Scottsdale, Ariz.
Feb. 13-16 – The Genesis Invitational, Pacific Palisades, Calif.
Feb. 20-23 – Mexico Open at VidantaWorld, Vallarta, Mexico
Feb. 27-March 2 – Cognizant Classic in The Palm Beaches, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
March 6-9 – Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard, Orlando, Fla.
March 6-9 – Puerto Rico Open, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico
March 13-16 – The Players Championship, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.
March 20-23 – Valspar Championship, Palm Harbor, Fla.
March 27-30 – Texas Children's Houston Open, Houston
April 3-6 – Valero Texas Open, San Antonio, Texas
April 10-13 – Masters Tournament, Augusta, Ga.
April 17-20 – Corales Puntacana Championship, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
April 17-20 – RBC Heritage, Hilton Head Island, SC
April 24-27 – Zurich Classic of New Orleans, Avondale, La.
May 1-4 – The CJ Cup Byron Nelson, McKinney, Tex